

inside

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HOKIESPORTS

The Official Publication of Virginia Tech Athletics

WHAT'S INSIDE:

A position-by-position
analysis of the 2015
football squad

2015 FOOTBALL *PREVIEW*

Michael Brewer and Kendall
Fuller are two of many returning
pieces for the Hokies, who
expect to be in contention for
an ACC title this fall

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contents

Hokie Club News | 2

News & Notes | 6

Coleman, Teller excel in strength and conditioning testing

From the Editor's Desk | 9

Consistency on offense key to Hokies' 2015 success

Behind the Mic - Jon Laaser | 10

Tech's new "Voice" introduces himself to Hokie Nation

Compliance | 12

Academic Spotlight - Kennedy Bryan | 14

Volleyball player seeks future career in art

Academic Spotlight - Darius Redman | 15

Football player may do something in television in future

Football Position Previews | 16

A position-by-position analysis of the 2015 Tech squad

August Photospread - Indoor Practice Facility | 30

New graphics, banners added to complete project

Women's Soccer Preview | 32

Meier, Tiernan to lead a women's squad looking to continue recent string of success

Men's Soccer Preview | 36

Returning talent and depth has head coach optimistic

Volleyball Preview | 38

Owens anchors a young Hokie squad

Cross Country Preview | 42

Tech men poised for run at ACC title; women reloading

IHS Extra - Tribute to Jim Weaver | 44

Former Tech AD's legacy will not be forgotten



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DOMINICAN TRIP
LEARNING EXPERIENCE
FOR GROUP OF TECH
STUDENT-ATHLETES

In early June, a group of 11 Virginia Tech student-athletes traveled to the Dominican Republic as part of a summer school course entitled Global Citizen Leadership. The group included Maggie Tyler (softball), Kelly Williford (women's tennis), Ben Borgert (swimming), Logan Stevens (diving), Lauren Buckworth (swimming), Donovan Riley (football), Carson Wise (football), Woody Baron (football), Nick Brascetta (wrestling), Haley Lukefahr (lacrosse) and Marie Johnston (track). They spent 11 days there, staying at the Punta Cana Ecological Foundation. They toured schools in Veron, visited

a batey in El Seibo where sugar cane workers live and make a little more than \$5 a day, and ran sports camps for kids. During the evenings, they spent time studying about leadership, global development and self-assessment techniques that help one become the best leader possible. This marked the fourth year that student-athletes have taken part in this course. The athletics department's office of student-athlete development, overseen by Reyna Gilbert-Lowry (associate AD for student-athlete development) and Danny White (assistant AD for student-athlete development), coordinates the trip in conjunction with the university.

THE STUDENT-ATHLETE
EXPERIENCE

"It was a great experience. We had a lot of fun down there, especially the camp we ran for the kids. That was the most fun. It was a fun experience spending the time with other athletes and the kids at the camp, but it was also a little eye opening when we went to see how some of the people were living. We visited a batey, which is where the sugar cane workers live, and that was eye opening just seeing how they live. So the whole trip was eye opening, but there were a lot of enjoyable aspects as well."

Woody Baron
Junior | Nashville, Tennessee

"It was very humbling. I started to see things in a different lens. I learned to appreciate things a lot more and not take things for granted. The things we take for granted are the things they don't have. The opportunities that we're given are opportunities that they'll never receive. I learned to appreciate everything that's given to me. I appreciate my parents. I appreciate the little things, and I try to give back. I want to help others."

Donovan Riley
Senior | Baltimore, Maryland



The Donor File

Jeff and Leslie Heinz Knapp

CURRENTLY RESIDES:
Hickory, North Carolina

GRADUATION YEAR: 1983

FAMILY: Drew (son, class of 2012; masters from Georgetown University, 2015); Sarah (daughter, class of 2014; MBA from College of Charleston, 2016); and Ashley (daughter, class of 2016)



Q&A

Q: A Hokie is ...

A: A Hokie is a passionate member and supporter of the Virginia Tech community.

Q: The Hokie Nation is real because ...

A: The Hokie Nation is real because you can sense it wherever you are, home games or away, in Blacksburg or wherever your travels take you. We even heard "GO HOKIES" while visiting our daughters abroad.

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

A: Tailgating with our children while they were/are students at Virginia Tech.

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

A: Once we settled in Hickory as a family, we were able to visit Virginia Tech frequently and decided to support the Hokie Club.

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

A: We are a family of five Hokie graduates!

Q: Do you have any gameday superstitions? If so, what are they?

A: Don't miss "Enter Sandman!"

Q: What motivated you to give back to help Virginia Tech athletics?

A: We always knew we wanted to give back, and with our love of athletics, it seemed like a perfect match.

Q: Why are you a Hokie Club member?

A: I'm a Hokie Club member because we want to continue to support our Virginia Tech student-athletes.

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE ...

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TARA NAHODIL
Center
Pine Grove, Pa.
Major: Human Development



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Letter from Bill

To Hokie Nation:

I am truly honored to serve as the new senior associate athletics director of development and executive director of the Hokie Club. The opportunity to work at a tradition-rich institution like Virginia Tech is unquestionably an honor and a privilege. My family is thrilled to make Blacksburg our new home.

I look forward to meeting as many of you as possible in the coming weeks and months. Working in conjunction with the talented and dedicated staff of the Hokie Club, we'll continue to push Virginia Tech athletics onward and upward, together.

Hokies everywhere owe a debt of gratitude to Lu Merritt for his tremendous leadership and his many years of dedicated service to the Hokie Club and Virginia Tech. I join you in saluting Lu for his accomplishments and wish him well in retirement. He and I have met several times, and I will continue to draw on his experience and historical knowledge.

To say that I'm excited to hear "Enter Sandman" and experience the passion of our fans at Lane Stadium in person is an understatement. I know we're all anxiously waiting for Sept. 7 when the defending national champion Ohio State Buckeyes come to town! I seem to recall the Hokies winning last year in Columbus.

With your help, the Hokie Club can and will continue to provide the resources necessary for all 22 of our teams and our 550 student-athletes to compete for championships, and most importantly, for our student-athletes to earn their degrees from such a respected institution as Virginia Tech. The value of a scholarship is near and dear to my heart and is the primary reason I am in this profession. I am a former student-athlete myself, and I believe in the student-athlete experience, what it teaches and what it represents.

Today, our 10,000-plus donors help provide nearly \$12.9 million in scholarship funding for deserving Hokies student-athletes every year. You are making a difference and having a profound impact on their lives and the generations that follow. Thank you!

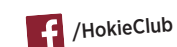
Again, thank you for the warm welcome. Our family is already wearing the Virginia Tech colors with tremendous pride. We can't wait to meet you.

Go Hokies!

Sincerely,

Bill Lansden

Bill Lansden
Sr. Associate Athletics Director of Development/
Executive Director of the Hokie Club



Coleman, Teller win Excalibur Awards

Tech running back J.C. Coleman and offensive lineman Wyatt Teller each earned the Excalibur Award, the top honor in the strength and conditioning program, after the Hokies’ summer strength and conditioning testing concluded in late July.

In all, 55 players earned awards following the testing, including 14 who earned Super Iron Hokie status. The Super Iron status includes the power clean, bench press, back or front squat and the overhead push jerk, whereas the Excalibur Award factors in those lifts and the vertical jump and 10-yard sprint.

The 14 Super Iron Hokies included Coleman, Teller, Trey Edmunds, Travon McMillian, Woody Baron, Ken Ekanem, Johnathan Galante, Quinton Taylor, Ronny Vandyke, Chuck Clark, Brandon Facyson, Greg Jones, Donovan Riley and Joey Slye.

The 14 marked the most for the Hokies since 2004.

“We’ve been averaging around eight per

summer,” said Dr. Mike Gentry, the associate AD for athletic performance. “Two other guys would have made it without a doubt, but Augie Conte strained his chest and we didn’t max him on the bench, and then we didn’t push Sam Rogers because of the elbow [Rogers did not do the push jerk].

“Now, you don’t really want to talk about ‘would have beens.’ We’ve probably had the same situation in years past. Fourteen is outstanding. I’ll take that.”

Coleman set the tailback record in the front squat (465 pounds), which tied for the team best in that lift with Conte, though Coleman is considered the top lifter in the front squat because he weighs less than Conte. Conte set the offensive guard record in the push jerk (415).

Teller nearly broke the all-time record in the power clean (400), though he did set a record for guards. His mark ranks second all time behind Kory Robertson’s record (405, 2007).

Conte’s 395-pound mark in the power clean

ranks fourth all time behind Robertson, Teller and Jesse Allen (395, 2005), who holds the tiebreaker over Conte because he weighs less than Conte. Also, Terrell Edmunds’ 41.5-inch vertical jump now ranks eighth on the all-time list.

In all, 10 offensive linemen earned awards and nine receivers, which were the most by position – and two positions of concern among most of Hokie Nation. But at the least, those groups prepared themselves for preseason practices, particularly the offensive linemen.

Overall, Gentry liked what the team accomplished over the summer.

“I like the leadership within the team,” he said. “It’s as good as it’s been in a very long time, and Sam Rogers and Chuck Clark are particularly good leaders. But they’re certainly not the only ones. There was a lot of positivity and people working toward a common goal of winning and getting better. I think that has translated into some good gains.”



2015 SUMMER STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING RESULTS

BENCH PRESS	FRONT SQUAT	POWER CLEAN	PUSH JERK	VERTICAL JUMP	10-YARD SPRINT
Wyatt Teller (460)	J.C. Coleman (465)	Wyatt Teller (400)	Augie Conte (415)	Terrell Edmunds (41.5)	Dahman McKinnon (1.61)
Dahman McKinnon (425)	Augie Conte (465)	Augie Conte (395)	Wyatt Teller (390)	Adonis Alexander (40.5)	J.C. Coleman (1.62)
Alston Smith (420)	Wade Hansen (450)	Seth Dooley (340)	Woody Baron (340)	Dahman McKinnon (39.5)	Kevin Asante (1.65)
Luther Maddy (410)	Wyatt Teller (450)	Yosuah Nijman (335)	Wade Hansen (330)	Dadi Nicolas (38.5)	C.J. Carroll (1.65)
Marshawn Williams (405)	Sam Rogers (440)	Ronny Vandyke (330)	Parker Osterloh (330)	J.C. Coleman (38.5)	Deon Newsome (1.66)

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editor's desk | by Jimmy Robertson

Tech offense in search of consistency in 2015 – and with talent and experience, it should have it

August 7 marked the end of a transitional summer in Blacksburg, as the 2015 Virginia Tech football squad began practicing in preparation for the season opener against Ohio State on Labor Day night.

Think about this. In the past six months, Dr. Paul Torgersen (former university president) and Jim Weaver (former AD) have passed away. Sharon McCloskey (senior woman administrator), Dave Smith (former associate AD for athletics communications) and Lu Merritt (former senior director of development for intercollegiate athletics) have retired. Beloved radio voice Bill Roth departed for the West Coast.

New faces are on board, and now the focus turns to the football season, where head coach Frank Beamer remains the constant within Tech athletics. Entering his 29th season, Beamer feels great after last season's throat surgery, and he returns 16 starters, both kickers and the enthusiasm from a bowl win, which he hopes propels his team into this fall.

The question Tech football fans have posed to each other throughout this summer is this: "How will the Hokies do this fall?"

My answer: "It depends on the offense."

It's not a secret here. You know what you're getting with Bud Foster's defense, the essential component to Beamer's philosophy. Tech's defensive coordinator often fields a unit that plays hard, plays fast and produces. The numbers bare that out. Tech's defense has finished in the top 12 nationally in total defense eight times in the 11 years since the Hokies joined the ACC.

But offensively, the Hokies have been up

and down over the past decade, combining flashes of great play with periods of poor. Even last season, Tech's offense played well in wins over Ohio State, UNC, Virginia and Cincinnati; not so well in defeats to Pittsburgh, Miami and Wake.

So the real question, from this perspective, isn't, "How will the Hokies do this fall?" It is, "What needs to happen for the offense be better?"

Tech's players provided some insight.

"The offense has to be more consistent," tailback J.C. Coleman said.

"The motto this year is to be consistent," receiver Isaiah Ford said.

"Just have consistency. That's our biggest thing," tight end Bucky Hodges said.

Sense a theme here?

Tech's offense did not rank in the top 50 nationally in any of the big four categories – scoring offense, total offense, rushing offense or passing offense – in 2014. The Hokies lost the turnover battle for the season, and only 26 teams nationally out of 125 allowed more sacks.

Yet in four of Tech's six losses, the Hokies led or were tied in the fourth quarter.

"We beat Ohio State in the second game, but we lost to Wake Forest, so we were definitely at two different ends of the spectrum," said Hodges, arguably Tech's top weapon. "So the big thing for us is consistency and staying together and finishing games. Every team we played, it seemed like we were either tied or had the lead in the fourth quarter, and we lost a lot of games. We know we can play with everybody. We just have to develop an attitude and finish games."

Hopefully, that mentality comes with

experience. Tech lost five games by seven points or less last fall, and in fairness, injuries at tailback and on the offensive line forced a lot of juggling, which leads to inconsistency.

But it also led to young players gaining valuable on-the-job training. Therein lies the biggest reason for optimism with this unit as the Hokies head into the 2015 season. Nineteen players on offense have started at least one game in their careers.


Other reasons for high expectations include offensive coordinator Scot Loeffler going into his third year at Tech with a returning starter at quarterback for the first time, and Michael Brewer now feeling confident in the scheme. The offensive line played well this spring, and the Hokies scored more points this spring than perhaps in any other spring practice.

There is a sense of focus within this group, too.

"We've been trying to practice like champions," Ford said. "Every rep is a Super Bowl rep. That's what Coach Loeffler says, and that's been the main focus, and I think everyone will be surprised this year."

Everything points to improvement – talent, depth, experience and coaching. The trend appears to be heading upward. Obviously, that is a good thing.

There has been transition off the field this summer, in various offices within the athletics department, and that hasn't been the norm. But on the field this fall, there should be plenty of stability.

It starts with Coach Beamer, Coach Foster and that defense. And the offense should follow suit. 








Hello from the “New Guy on Campus”

Greetings Hokies! It is my great honor to be coming to you in a variety of mediums as the new “Voice of the Hokies.” I am writing this piece on the computer that used to belong to Bill Roth, perched on his old desk, residing in his former office.

That is a fitting place to start. “How do you replace a legend?” That is, without a doubt, the most frequent question I have fielded since I received the life-changing news that I was to be entrusted with this tremendous role. The answer in this case is that you most definitely do not. The impact that Bill had at Virginia Tech will live on forever – certainly through the joy and consolation he provided during the highs and lows of athletics competition, but more importantly, through the countless times he provided those same things throughout the community.

It would be highly presumptive on my part to believe I can immediately step in and fill that role in your lives. Nor will my call of the games, or my presence in the community, exactly mirror Bill’s. Twenty-seven years ago, Bill’s time in Blacksburg undoubtedly began with a single handshake, and a commitment to this proud university. He did a Hall of Fame job of building from there.

That is also where I begin my time here. With a simple commitment to you, Hokie Nation, I will passionately pursue the creation of those relationships. While doing so, I also will be mindful that I am merely a conduit to the thrilling action that will be provided by the Hokies on the gridiron, hardwood and other competition venues. I believe you will appreciate my enthusiastic style. Like you, I



New radio play-by-play voice Jon Laaser (left) and color analyst Mike Burnop are ready to call the action for Tech fans this season.

find my thoughts consistently drifting to what might be on Sept. 7 at Lane Stadium, and for that matter, what is to come in the weeks and years ahead. At times, it gives me goose bumps to imagine the possibilities, and what my call of those impending moments will be.

Recently, Director of Athletics Whit Babcock asked me when I knew I was capable of speaking for an entire community, and where I had developed a level of comfort in that position. At the time, I responded that I had been blessed with a uniquely supportive family that allowed me to gain experience while literally chasing my dreams to every corner of the country. That opportunity, combined with an unrelenting desire and a God-given ability,

has brought me to this place in my life.

That is all true. I come from a long line of pastors familiar with delivering messages of great importance. My father, Mark, is a reputed speaker; my grandfather, Robert, was a pastor, and my uncle, David, was a pastor. Although I didn’t follow their specific path, I have always believed I am partially living their dream. Sports were, and are, a big part of their lives. My grandfather, in particular, was extremely fond of incorporating sports themes into his sermons. He was known to say, “I answered God’s call, but if the St. Louis Cardinals had called first, it would have been a tough decision.” The man had a great sense of humor.

After the fact, I reflected a bit further on

Whit’s initial question and a more precise moment became clear.

In the fall of 2003, I had just completed my first season in a baseball broadcast booth with the St. Cloud (MN) River Bats. I was then given the opportunity to call high school football for Rocori High School, a small rural school about 15 miles outside of St. Cloud. I had never heard of it, but as an eager 23-year-old, I jumped at the chance.

Rocori, as I learned, was not a town itself, but represented a cooperative high school between three small towns – Rockville, Cold Spring and Richmond, Minnesota. I quickly discovered that, like Blacksburg, it was a relatively small, but magical place. The reception I received from that community was remarkably similar to the one I have received from Hokie Nation over the past few weeks – overwhelmingly welcoming and sincere. Another similarity was their immense passion for football. “Spartan Nation” wasn’t nearly as large, but the games impacted the members’ lives in much the same way as Tech games do here.

The Spartans had a phenomenally talented team in 2003, headlined by current New York Jets’ receiver Eric Decker. I was three games – all wins – into my time as the “Voice of the Spartans” when I woke up on Wednesday,

Sept. 24, to live news coverage originating from the high school. I was living an hour away at the time in a suburb of Minneapolis. I immediately knew it wasn’t good news.

In an unimaginable place, there had been a shooting at the school. For hours, there was excruciating confusion, but ultimately it was learned that two students, Seth Bartell (15) and Aaron Rollins (17), had been killed by another student. Former head football coach Mark Johnson had heroically disarmed the shooter, but not in time to avoid tragedy.

Disbelief hung in the air on Thursday. The Spartans were scheduled to play the following night at rival Apollo High School. The administration went back and forth on the decision as to whether to play the game or not, but finally decided that the community could use the distraction the football game would provide.

This meant that, at the age of 23 and only having just begun not only my career, but also my time in Cold Spring, I would be delivering the first public words to a community stricken with shock and grief. I was terrified.

My dad accompanied me to the booth that night, and I had the good fortune of having Gary Distel as my analyst. Gary, like Mike Burnop, is a strong pillar of his community. He greeted me with the words, “You’re the right person to speak to them.” I wasn’t so

sure.

As the broadcast open played, I still wasn’t sure what my words would be. At that point, I hadn’t felt the loss in my life that those people had. Just as the producer cued me, the words came to me, albeit delivered in a trembling voice.

“Good evening Spartan Nation, I’m Jon Laaser. You don’t know me very well, but I know you are hurting. That hurt probably will never go away. Tonight, we present a football game, not in the interest of declaring a winner, but as a reminder that this is who we are and that we will get through this ... together.”

To this day, I don’t know where the strength to utter those words came from. I do know that those words helped some, if only in a very small way. I also know that strength continues to arrive when I need it most. It is the origin of the confidence I have in becoming your “Voice.”

In the years to come, we will experience many tremendously exciting and happy moments together. We will inevitably suffer some incredibly heart-breaking and sad ones as well. I look forward to both. They are the experiences that shape who we are. I can’t wait to learn who you are, and for you to get to know me. I am exceptionally proud to say forever from this point on that I am a Hokie. Thank you for your warm welcome! Go Hokies! VT

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GO Hokies!

Keeping up *with* Compliance

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

Q: Just curious as to the craziest NCAA violation you've ever heard of since you starting doing this. Anything outlandish? Thanks, Tommy in Blacksburg.

TP: "A few stick out, though nothing pertaining to Virginia Tech. There was a player at Alabama who was suspended for a game after being awarded too much scholarship money because of a computer entry error. The player repaid the money and was reinstated."

"Last year, Oklahoma penalized three student-athletes for eating too much pasta at a graduation banquet and made them pay restitution. The NCAA staff then came out and said that since portion sizes were not specifically addressed in the NCAA regulations, it wasn't, in fact, a violation – just another example of the complexity of the NCAA manual."

"And as far as a 'rule' that the media liked to lampoon, it used to be a violation for a

school to prohibit cream cheese for student-athletes' bagels. Several years ago, the schools in NCAA Division I voted to allow athletics departments to provide fruits, nuts, and bagels to student-athletes in unlimited quantities at any time. Unfortunately, the provision of all other foods – including cream cheese – remained a minor violation. That silliness ended with a major deregulation in the area of rules related to food two years ago.


"I'm sure there are others, but those are the first ones that come to mind. Fortunately, the NCAA membership is moving our rules in a more progressive direction to help avoid these types of situations."

Q: What's the latest on the North Carolina situation? It seems like that situation has been going on forever. Is there an end in sight? Thanks, Ann in Pembroke.

TP: "The timeline is still uncertain, but

the case is now moving again. In late May, a formal 'notice of allegations' was sent to North Carolina, alleging that the Tar Heels committed five severe violations from 2002-11, including a lack of institutional control within its athletics department. Two of the allegations were related to impermissible benefits tied to academics and two involved members of the African and Afro-American Studies department violating the NCAA principles of ethical conduct by not assisting with the NCAA investigation."

"North Carolina now has 90 days to submit a response to the NCAA, so those officials should be responding to the allegations before the first of September. Then the NCAA's enforcement staff will then have 60 days to conduct a pre-hearing conference with UNC officials. A hearing before the Committee on Infractions will be scheduled at a later time."

"So the North Carolina case probably won't get resolved before early next year." 

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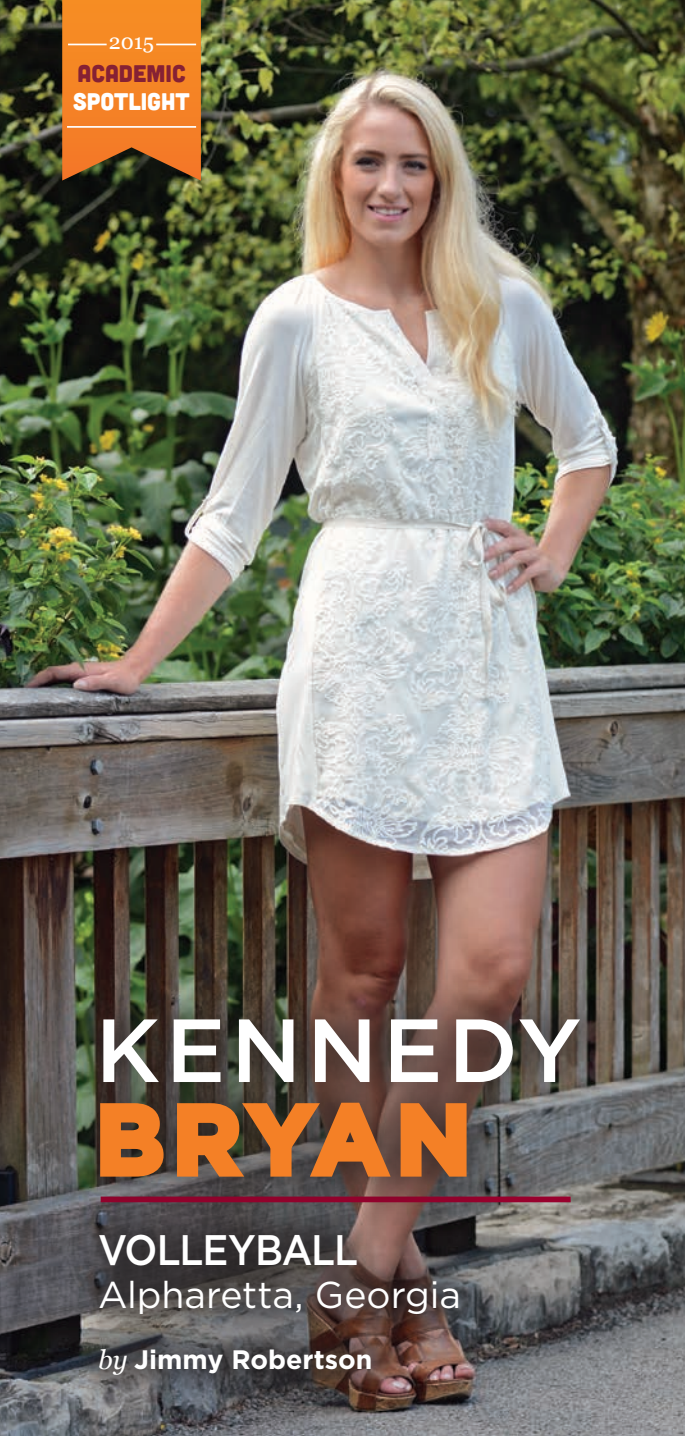
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VIRGINIA



KENNEDY BRYAN

VOLLEYBALL
Alpharetta, Georgia

by Jimmy Robertson

A member of Tech's volleyball squad, **Kennedy Bryan** saw action in 22 matches last season for the Hokies as an outside hitter. She is scheduled to graduate next May with a degree in art and may become an art teacher or work at a museum in the future.

Q: What led you to major in art?

KB: "I had always loved art growing up and thoroughly enjoyed being in art classes. However, when I came on my first few visits to Virginia Tech, I thought I wanted to major in something in the science department. I had an amazing art teacher in high school who really pushed me to exceed the expectations I had of myself. It wasn't until my last visit to Virginia Tech that I toured SOVA (School of Visual Arts), and I fell in love. I knew that day that this was the right school and major for me."

Q: Why have you decided on your particular career path?

KB: "I decided to be an art major and pursue a career with art because I am absolutely in love with it. There is a quote that says, 'If you do what you love, you'll never work a day in your life.' I really believe this is true. I enjoy going to my classes every day. I even go early sometimes and stay late. I have found what I love, and I know that I will be happy doing almost anything with it."


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

KB: "I have one in the fall with one of my professors and Virginia-based artist, Eric Stanley, and another one in the spring with Ray Kass, an internationally recognized artist. In the fall, I do not have classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays, so I am going to try to volunteer with an art teacher at one of the local elementary schools in Blacksburg. I really enjoy working with kids, so by doing this, I will hopefully figure out if being an art teacher is something I really want to look into."

"On Aug. 1, I will be working in Virginia Beach at the MOCA (Museum of Contemporary Art) with my professor that I am interning with in the fall (Stanley). I will be working as an assistant during the Master Class and Artists Talk that he will be doing. This will give me the opportunity to see what working with a museum will be like and hopefully aid in my decision making for what I want to do after college."

Q: What are your future plans?

KB: "I have a few ideas of what I would like to do after college, but I have not committed to anything as of now. I'm exploring the ideas of continuing to play volleyball overseas, getting a master's degree, or trying to get a job. This year, I am working toward each of those in an attempt to give myself as many options as possible once I start to make my decisions."

"As of now, I am considering teaching, working in a gallery or museum since I also have a minor in art history, as well as any of the job opportunities that may come from my internships. Of course, I would love to be able to make a living off of selling my artwork. Whatever I end up doing after college, I will always continue to make my own artwork and sell it even if it is not my main occupation." 



DARIUS REDMAN

FOOTBALL
Washington, D.C.

by Jimmy Robertson

Darius Redman plays offensive tackle on Tech's football team, and he graduated with a degree in sociology this past spring. He's working on a second degree in theatre arts, with a concentration in cinema, and though he hasn't totally decided on a career path, he may be doing something in front of a camera down the road.

Q: First of all, why did you decide to get a degree in sociology?

DR: "Well, teaching. When I was younger, I always had a good relationship with my teachers, so I thought maybe one day I'd like to teach, preferably high school kids before they go off to college. I'd like to give them a better understanding of what to expect while in college and try to prepare them more. When they're on the way to college, they don't really know what to do or how to better prepare themselves."

"I think a lot of kids are behind or clueless on how to handle themselves. I know I wasn't ready. I was going to play three years and go to the NFL. The school aspect didn't mean that much to me, and I want to let that be known to kids going into college. That's not the right way to approach college. The earlier you let them know, the better."


Q: Why are you getting a second degree in theatre arts?

DR: "I like the spotlight. I feel like I have a great voice that people will listen to, so why not be a cinema major? That could be my job one day, being in front of the camera. People tell me all the time that they could see me acting or doing anything in front of a camera. I'm taking theater and a couple of other classes this fall. I've taken acting before, so I'm going to take the next level of that class. I liked that class because we got to pick what we wanted to do, and I got to get into character. It was cool. We had to do a skit in front of the class, and that was like the test. I'm comfortable talking in front of different amounts of people. I'm never nervous when talking. I guess it comes natural."

Q: You're also writing a book, right?

DR: "Yes, I love to write. It's called 'Karma.' It's about a kid who did bad things all his life, pulled pranks and things like that. The story begins while he's in college and he goes back [in time]. One morning, he wakes up and someone has spray-painted on his car, 'I never forgot.' That's when things really start to happen. I wanted to have it out by November since my brother's birthday is in November. We'll see how it goes, but I definitely want to have it out by the end of the year."

Q: What are your future plans?

DR: "I'm trying to narrow it down. My mind is all over the place. Some days, I want to be in fashion or own my own restaurant or do something with cinema. I feel like I'm capable of doing a lot of things. It's just a question of where I'm going to start. I talk to Kevin Jones [assistant AD, special projects and design] a lot because he's been in the same situation. But I have a degree, and I'm working on a second degree. I have options." 





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Michael Brewer

BREWER more comfortable heading into year No. 2 at Tech

by Jimmy Robertson

Michael Brewer celebrated America's birthday with a trip to the Florida Keys, where he and his dad went fishing near Islamorada. The trip turned out to be fruitful, too, as Brewer caught a 150-pound tarpon. He took a photo of the fish before releasing it back to the sea.

"My dad and I always wanted to catch a tarpon," he said. "We went down there, and on July 4, I caught a 150-pound tarpon. It was awesome."

Now, with practice for the 2015 season having started, Brewer hopes to reel in something much bigger – an ACC championship.

Much of Tech's chances hinge on improved play from Brewer, who, barring something unforeseen, will be the starting quarterback against Ohio State on Labor Day night. He completed nearly 60 percent of his passes a year ago, throwing for 2,692 yards and 18 touchdowns. But he also threw 15 interceptions, including some costly ones (e.g. Georgia Tech).

A lot of the mistakes can be attributed to being a "new" quarterback. He finished up coursework toward his degree from Texas Tech in the spring of 2014 and transferred after the semester. He did not get to go through spring practice with the Hokies and only started learning coordinator Scot Loeffler's complex offense that June.

This spring, though, he looked like a veteran

quarterback, and Tech's offense played better as a result.

"Night and day," Brewer said of the difference between this year and last year. "Last year, we started the first week of June, and we started camp the first week of August. It was fast and furious trying to learn everything and having to install stuff on the fly and throughout the season."

"Now, I experienced all that last year. I have all the installs down. I've been able to climb into the depth of why we're doing certain things, like why I should check into this instead of that and protection stuff and learning about defenses. There has been a lot of talk about football this offseason [between he and Loeffler], and I feel like I'm light years ahead of where I was last year."

Loeffler has noticed, too. He coached the quarterbacks hard last year and carried it over in spring practice, particularly with Brewer and Brenden Motley. He made it clear of his high expectations of both.

Yet Brewer said that Loeffler gradually gave him some freedom last year and continues gradually to let him take control.

"As I got more comfortable and learned what was going on, he saw that, and he'd give me a little more freedom here and there whether it'd be to audible into any pass play or run play when we're in a certain set or formation," Brewer said. "Or giving me

A QUICK GLANCE

Returning starter: Michael Brewer (13 career starts)

Starter lost: none

Projected new starter: none

Top reserves: Brenden Motley, Chris Durkin, Dwayne Lawson

Newcomers: Durkin, Lawson

Breakout candidate: Brewer

Notes: Brewer threw just five interceptions in the final eight games after throwing 10 in the first five ... Brewer threw for at least 300 yards in just one game last season (345 vs. BC) ... He threw for at least 250 yards in five games ... Brewer completed at least 50 percent of his passes in every game except for two – and yet the Hokies won both of those games (Western Michigan and Virginia) ... Motley played 23 snaps last season ... None of the other backups have played in a collegiate game.

2015 FALL DEPTH CHART

QUARTERBACKS

- 12 Michael Brewer (6-0, 196, r-Sr.)
- 9 Brenden Motley (6-2, 223, r-Jr.)
- 13 Chris Durkin (6-4, 221, r-Fr.)
- 16 Jack Click (6-3, 206, Fr.)
- Dwayne Lawson (6-6, 207, Fr.)

the reins on all this offseason stuff. He was basically saying, 'Hey, make sure you all are doing 7-on-7 [passing drills] on this day and this day,' and I'd go out there and run it. He's been giving me a lot more control of some things."

Motley is the only experienced quarterback behind Brewer, having played in just five games in three years. He started getting more and more reps last season after the Hokies lost back-to-back games to Miami and Boston College. Used mostly as a "wildcat" quarterback, he completed just one pass on the season, but ran it 14 times for 72 yards.

Tech's quarterbacks figure to be running a much more potent offense this season. The Hokies return both starting receivers, three talented tight ends and all their running backs. The offensive line, at least the first unit, appears to be much improved.

Improvement from everyone will be needed – the Hokies finished 96th nationally in total offense a year ago.

"We don't feel like we have anything to prove to anybody but ourselves," Brewer said. "We've got a lot of pride on the offensive side of the ball, and we understand that last year was last year, and we're leaving it at that."

"We feel we shouldn't set a ceiling for ourselves heading into this next season. We've obviously got to go out and execute, and we're excited to see what the results are."



J.C. Coleman

COLEMAN ready to build on 2014 ending

by Jimmy Robertson

One might think that J.C. Coleman spent the better portion of his summer taking it easy. After all, he was the Military Bowl MVP and he came out of spring practice listed as No. 1 at the tailback position on the depth chart.

Truthfully, though, Coleman worked harder than ever before to get ready for this season.

"I've got to keep on working," Coleman said. "Trey [Edmunds] is working, and Marshawn [Williams] is hungry. He wants to get back out there. Travon McMillian is very hungry. He wants to play. D.J. Reid is a good back. You've got all these guys fighting for one ball. The coaches are probably going into the season with two backs that are going to get the majority of the carries, so I've got to keep on working."

Coleman led the Hokies in rushing in 2014 with a career-high 533 yards on 107 carries, averaging 5.0 yards per carry. He also scored three touchdowns.

All but 65 of those rushing yards came in the final four games. Injuries to Shai McKenzie, Trey Edmunds and Marshawn Williams left running backs coach Shane Beamer with little choice but to play Coleman – and Coleman delivered.

He rushed for at least 95 yards in each of the Hokies' final four games, including a 118-yard performance against Virginia and a 157-yard outing against Cincinnati in the Military Bowl. He averaged 5.8 yards per carry in that span despite being 5-foot-7, 190 pounds.

"I wouldn't say I was surprised," Coleman said. "I always felt I could play at that level. Some things just had to click for me, and they finally did click. I was able to get into a rhythm with things. I didn't have to think about stuff. I knew my assignments. I knew what was going to

happen and was able to anticipate what was going to happen in a game. I was able to do all that at the end of the season, and also the offensive line really jelled together. So there was a lot of stuff going on, but I wouldn't say I was surprised."

Tech appears to be in good shape at tailback, with Coleman and Edmunds leading the way. Edmunds missed much of last season with injuries, including a fractured clavicle suffered against North Carolina, but he led the team in rushing in 2013 with 675 yards.

Travon McMillian dazzled at times this spring and may be the third tailback pending the statuses of McKenzie (indefinitely suspended) and Williams (recovering from a torn ACL) – Williams expects to be ready to go when the season kicks off, but the sports medicine staff is being a little more cautious with Williams' timetable. Beamer also could use Sam Rogers at tailback, if needed.

At fullback, Rogers returns after missing spring practice with a fractured elbow. Arguably, the Hokies' most versatile performer, he caught 20 passes for 230 yards and ran the ball 32 times for 140 yards. Steven Peoples, a walk-on from Galax, Virginia, impressed this spring after enrolling in January and may be the heir apparent at the position.

As a group, the running backs hope to improve on their numbers from a year ago. The Hokies rushed for just 147.9 yards per game, a number that ranked 86th nationally.

"The offense has to be more consistent," Coleman said. "We need to have a more consistent running game, and I think we will this year. We've got to eliminate turnovers. It's a little bit of everything, but it mainly falls back to the offense being more consistent."



A QUICK GLANCE

Returning starters: J.C. Coleman (nine career starts), Sam Rogers (eight career starts)

Starters lost: none

Projected new starters: none

Top reserves: Trey Edmunds, Travon McMillian, Marshawn Williams, Steven Peoples

Newcomers: McMillian, Peoples

Breakout candidate: Coleman

Notes: The Hokies' running backs have combined to play in 104 career games ... Tech had just one run of more than 40 yards last year (42, Williams) ... Coleman set career highs in rushing yards, rushing touchdowns and yards per carry (5.0) last year ... Rogers was the only player on Tech's roster with at least 20 carries and at least 20 receptions ... Peoples rushed for 3,078 yards and 44 touchdowns as a senior in high school in 2013 ... Peoples won the Frank O. Moseley Award for showing the most hustle in spring practice (offense).

2015 FALL DEPTH CHART

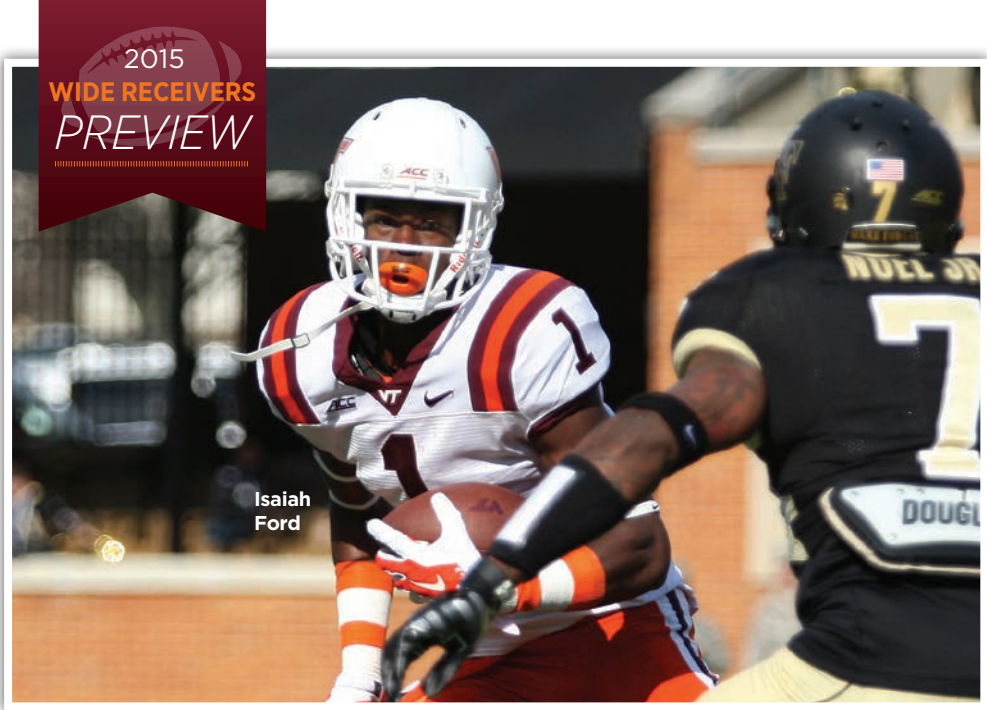
RUNNING BACKS

TAILBACKS

- 4 J.C. Coleman (5-7, 191, Sr.)
- 14 Trey Edmunds (6-1, 222, r-Jr.)
- 34 Travon McMillian (6-0, 199, r-Fr.)
- 48 D.J. Reid (6-0, 225, r-Fr.)
- 42 Marshawn Williams (5-11, 235, So.)

FULLBACKS

- 45 Sam Rogers (5-11, 222, Jr.)
- 32 Steven Peoples (5-9, 215, Fr.)
- 25 Jerome Wright (5-11, 223, Jr.)



Isaiah Ford

Shortly after the end of last season, Isaiah Ford took a few days off and pondered his schedule for the spring. A gifted basketball player, he contemplated going out for the Hokies' basketball team.

He elected not to do so, choosing instead to use the time to get bigger and stronger in the weight room. Nearly 15 pounds later, he feels he made the right decision.

"Me and Coach Gentry were laughing about this the other day," Ford said. "He had told me back in the winter that he thought it was a good choice that I didn't play basketball, and I kind of got mad at him.

"But after the winter session, I saw how I got stronger and bigger and faster, and I'm like, 'Well, maybe he was right.' So I don't regret it at all."

Ford played at 170 pounds as a true freshman, but weighed 184 pounds just a couple of weeks before practice started. The added weight and strength should be beneficial for a young man who led the Hokies in receptions (56) and yardage (709) last season. His six touchdowns receptions were just one shy of Bucky Hodges' team-high seven.

He played well enough to earn honorable mention All-ACC recognition, a nice accomplishment in his first season. But he fell short of his lofty goal.

"I thought I had a really good year," Ford said. "I'm not going to downplay it too much. Before the year, if you remember at media day, I said that I wanted to catch 10 touchdowns. I didn't get 10, but I got six. So I think I had a pretty good year. There were some little things that I needed to work on, or we probably could have gotten to those goals I set. But overall, I thought I had a good year."

Ford and Cam Phillips headline a receiving group that lacks proven depth. Phillips also played as a true freshman last season, and he caught 40 passes for 498 yards and three touchdowns.

But after those two, no other receiver on the depth chart caught more than seven passes last season. In fact, Deon Newsome played in 12 games and caught seven, and Demetri Knowles played in 12 and caught just three. No other receiver caught a pass, though Joel Caleb caught six as a tailback. Tech's staff moved him to receiver before spring practice.


The Hokies need for Knowles and Newsome to be more productive, particularly Knowles, who caught 45 passes as a sophomore. Hopefully, one or both can make up for Willie Byrn, who graduated after catching 47 passes last season.

Without a lot of experience behind them, Ford and Phillips figure to get a heavy workload again this season. They've gotten to work with the quarterbacks the entire summer – something they didn't get to do last summer – so they go into this season with high expectations.

"My goal is to get to 10," Ford said, referring to touchdown receptions. "Me and Cam both want to get the touchdowns and get over 1,000 yards. That hasn't been done here, but I think both of us have a really good chance of doing it. We've been working extremely hard. He's holding me accountable, and I'm holding him accountable. It's really good when you have a teammate with the same goals as you and is willing to work as hard as you."

The coaches plan on using the tight ends extensively in the passing game, but depth needs to emerge. Coordinator Scot Loeffler would rather not play Ford or Phillips 900-plus plays again, as both played last season.

Ford is optimistic that some of the unknown names will become known entities this season.

"Virginia Tech is 'DBU, [Defensive Back University]' so we have to deal with that and everyone talking about the DBs," he said. "But we're good, too. We want to show everyone that this receiving group is just as good as the defensive backs." 

FORD ready to improve upon big freshman year

by Jimmy Robertson

A QUICK GLANCE	
Returning starters:	Isaiah Ford (11 career starts), Cam Phillips (nine career starts)
Starters lost:	none
Projected new starters:	none
Top reserves:	Demetri Knowles, Deon Newsome, Kevin Asante, Joel Caleb
Newcomers:	Jaylen Bradshaw
Breakout candidate:	Ford
Notes:	Ford had the most catches and most receiving yards ever by a true freshman at Tech ... Ford is one of just eight Tech players ever to catch at least 50 passes in a season ... Ford ranked seventh in the ACC in receptions and 10th in receiving yardage last season ... Phillips' 40 receptions are tied for the third most by a freshman (behind Ford, Bucky Hodges and tied with Josh Stanford) and his 498 receiving yards were the fourth-most by a freshman at Tech (behind Ford, Hodges and Stanford).

2015 FALL DEPTH CHART	
WIDE RECEIVERS	
FLANKERS	
1	Isaiah Ford (6-1, 184, So.)
81	Kevin Asante (6-1, 186, r-Sr.)
15	Joel Caleb (6-2, 191, r-Jr.)
83	Charley Meyer (6-1, 213, r-Jr.)
SPLIT ENDS	
5	Cam Phillips (6-1, 191, So.)
80	Demetri Knowles (6-1, 179, r-Sr.)
20	Deon Newsome (5-11, 188, r-So.)
39	Jaylen Bradshaw (6-0, 192, r-Fr.)
86	C.J. Carroll (5-7, 162, r-Fr.)
22	Michael Brainard (6-0, 188, r-Sr.)

A QUICK GLANCE	
Returning starters:	Ryan Malleck (19 career starts), Bucky Hodges (10 career starts)
Starter lost:	none
Projected new starter:	none
Top reserves:	Kalvin Cline, Xavier Burke
Newcomer:	Burke
Breakout candidate:	Hodges
Notes:	Hodges' seven touchdown catches were tied for the most by a tight end in the ACC last season and tied for fifth overall ... Only one tight end in the ACC – Wake Forest's Cam Serigne – had more receptions than Hodges ... Hodges' 526 receiving yards were the most by a tight end under Frank Beamer ... Malleck's 39 career games played ranked tied for second on the team with A.J. Hughes and Corey Marshall (Luther Maddy has played in 43) ... Malleck has caught 41 career passes.

2015 FALL DEPTH CHART	
TIGHT ENDS	
88	Ryan Malleck (6-4, 251, r-Sr.)
7	Bucky Hodges (6-6, 241, r-So.)
89	Kalvin Cline (6-4, 242, r-So.)
82	Xavier Burke (6-3, 262, Fr.)
87	Matt Hill (6-5, 238, r-Fr.)

The Tech football team enters the 2015 season with several strengths, but perhaps no position holds more talent and promise than the tight end spot.

Consider this – Ryan Malleck and Bucky Hodges both made the "watch list" for the Mackey Award, which goes annually to the nation's top tight end. No other school had two players selected for this list.

"I was just happy that Malleck made it, too," Hodges said. "A lot of teams are finding out that we're not a joke. We're real tight ends. Having two of us on there, that was the most of any school, right? That's big time right there. That's my favorite part about it."

Hodges goes into this season as arguably Tech's top weapon on offense. He started 10 games a year ago as a redshirt freshman and caught 45 passes for 526 yards and a team-high seven touchdowns. His 45 receptions were the most ever by a Tech tight end in a single season under head coach Frank Beamer and one shy of Mike Burnop's single-season record.

USA Today selected Hodges for its Freshman All-America squad. The Atlantic Coast Sports Media Association (ACSMA) named him third-team All-ACC. He could be in line for more awards this season, provided, of course, he lives up to his immense potential.

"My goals and expectations are to do anything I can to help my team win," he said.



Bucky Hodges

Tight ends HODGES and MALLECK to have prominent roles in Tech offense

by Jimmy Robertson

"I don't worry about numbers. I just want to take it one game at a time, get better and get smarter than I was last year. I want to clean up my technique from last year and make big plays. I just want to go week by week and try to help this team win every game."

Tech's coaching staff plans on involving Hodges even more into the offense this season. The coaches came up with those plans over the winter and started implementing them during spring practice.

Hodges played multiple positions this spring. The coaches flanked him out wide, they worked him out of the slot and they featured him in an H-back type of role. At times, he struggled with the complexities of the scheme, but he progressed toward the end of the spring.

"At first, it was tough," he said. "We'd have a long play call and certain words tell you what to do. Lining up at so many positions, sometimes I'd hear the wrong word. I'd be at receiver and do what the tight end was supposed to do. Stuff like that. It started getting easier toward the end of spring. We've been doing 7-on-7 [passing drills] this summer, so it's getting easier. It's starting to become second nature to me."

Hodges also felt a little out of shape this spring. He got to 253 pounds over the winter just by naturally going through Tech's strength and conditioning program. But all the running

during spring practice took its toll on him, causing him to become winded at times.


He dropped to 241 pounds over the summer and feels more comfortable at that weight.

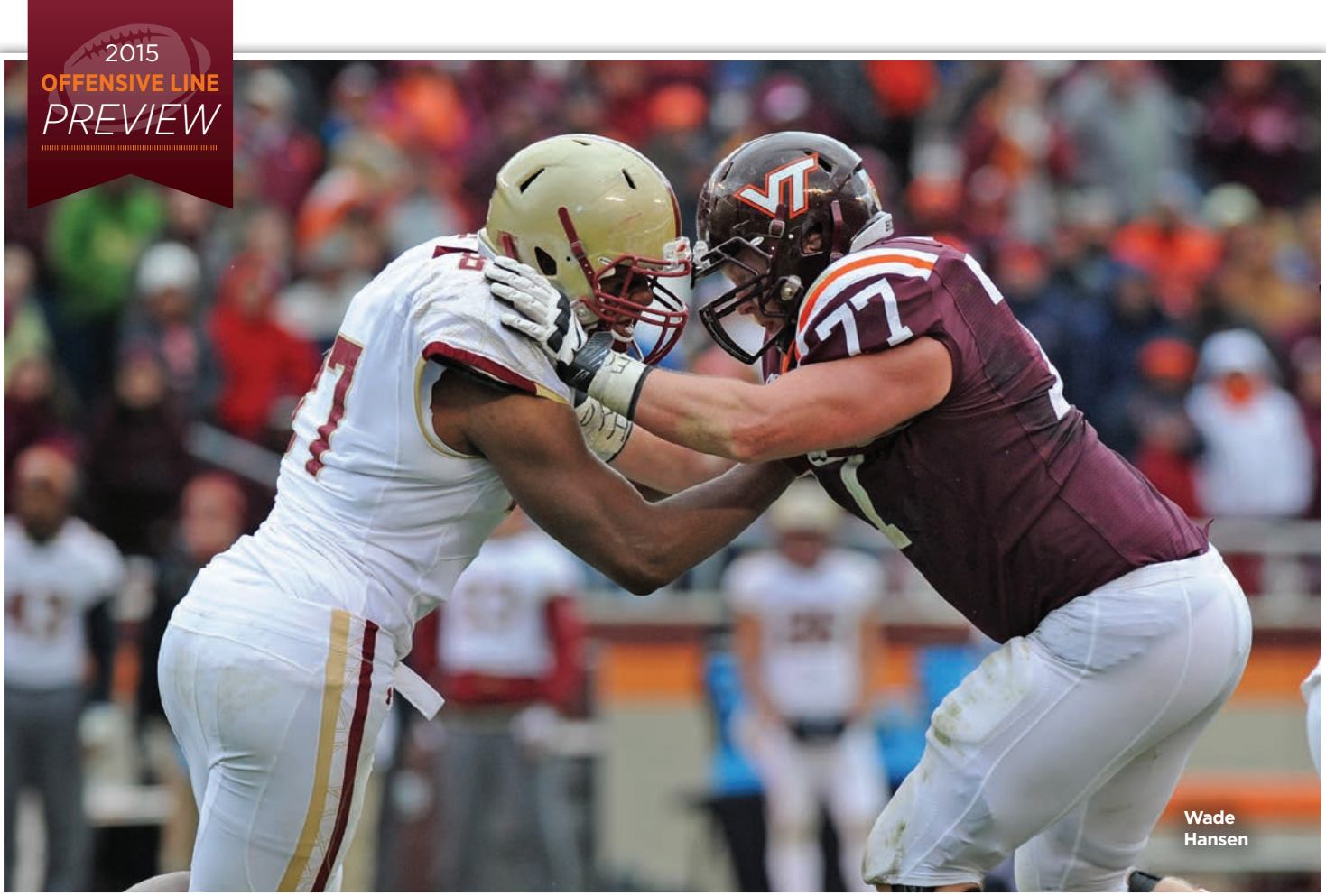
"I was a little heavy," he said. "I didn't feel fast or quick. Now I'm a whole lot stronger than last year. It's not even close. I'm in a lot better shape. I'm taking care of my body."

Tight ends coach Bryan Stinespring should be able to spell Hodges periodically, as Malleck returns for his final season after catching 24 passes for 195 yards and two touchdowns last season. He is a steady, dependable player, who, like Hodges, possesses the versatility to do many things.

Also, Calvin Cline returns after playing in just two games a year ago because of a knee injury. He received a medical hardship waiver, and the coaching staff hopes to see him return to the form he showed as a true freshman when he caught 26 passes for 321 yards and two touchdowns.

This trio, at the least, brings consistency to an offense that looked great at times and bad at others.

"That's our biggest thing," Hodges said of consistency. "Last season, we were young and inexperienced. We had some big wins. We beat Ohio State in the second game, but we lost to Wake Forest, so we were at two different ends of the spectrum. So the big thing for us is consistency and staying together and finishing games." 



HANSEN, improved offensive line optimistic heading in 2015 season

by Jimmy Robertson

Roughly this time a year ago, Wade Hansen walked into offensive line coach Stacy Searels’ office and listened to the pitch. Searels and the rest of Tech’s staff wanted to move Hansen from the defensive line to the offensive line.

Agreeable to the move, Hansen, a walk-on at the time, asked Searels a question.

“I asked him, ‘Coach, if I move to offensive line, will you help me earn a scholarship?’” Hansen said. “He said, ‘If you put in the effort and work hard, we’re going to get you to the point where you’re going to be looked at for a scholarship. We first need you to develop as an offensive lineman.’”

“So I put in the effort, and I had a pretty good spring this spring. I still remember the details when Coach [Frank] Beamer pulled me aside and said, ‘I’m going to take care of you this summer.’”

Beamer offered Hansen a scholarship this spring, completing an eventful year for the young man. He went from being a walk-on defensive lineman to an offensive lineman to a scholarship offensive lineman to a projected starter on the 2015 squad.

Hansen earned the job with his play at the

end of last season, when he took over for an injured Jonathan McLaughlin and started three games, and with his play this spring. His solid efforts in spring practice enabled Searels to keep McLaughlin at left tackle, where he replaces Laurence Gibson – one of three seniors to depart along the offensive line (Caleb Farris and David Wang being the other two).

“I was thrown to the wolves [last fall], but at the same time, it was a really good learning experience,” Hansen said. “Fully starting three games and getting a lot of reps helped, and then playing against Dadi Nicolas this spring was nice because I needed to develop in pass protection. He was a great asset to utilize just going against him every day. That was good to make sure I worked on my technique and my form. It still needs work, but I’m doing the extra work to make sure I have everything down. I feel like this spring and summer that I developed into the offensive lineman Coach Searels wants.”

Hansen, a fifth-year senior, provided a steadying influence to an offensive line that returns three starters from last season. He

A QUICK GLANCE

Returning starters: Jonathan McLaughlin (22 career starts), Augie Conte (10 career starts), Wyatt Teller (six career starts),

Starters lost: Laurence Gibson, Caleb Farris, David Wang

Projected new starters: Wade Hansen, Eric Gallo

Newcomers: Darius Redman, Yosuah Nijman, Tyrell Smith, Colt Pettit, Billy Ray Mitchell, Braxton Pfaff, Austin Clark

Breakout candidate: Teller

Notes: Tech averaged 166 yards rushing per game in its final four games ... McLaughlin has started every game in which he has played in his career ... Gallo played in just three games last season for a total of 14 snaps ... Hansen played 34 snaps on offense in the first eight games. He played 315 in the final five ... Tech’s projected backup offensive linemen combined to play 76 snaps on offense last season – 25 of those coming from Redman at the tight end spot ... Smith has played 44 snaps in his career, Osterloh has played 13 and Pfaff has played five. None of the other projected backups has played snaps on the offensive line.

2015 FALL DEPTH CHART

OFFENSIVE LINE

LEFT TACKLES

71 Jonathan McLaughlin (6-5, 304, Jr.)
69 Yosuah Nijman (6-6, 278, Fr.)
66 Billy Ray Mitchell (6-3, 276, r-Fr.)

LEFT GUARDS

57 Wyatt Teller (6-5, 302, r-So.)
67 Parker Osterloh (6-8, 331, r-So.)
55 Jack Willenbrock (6-3, 250, r-Jr.)

CENTERS

64 Eric Gallo (6-2, 298, So.)
79 Tyrell Smith (6-4, 288, Fr.)
58 Colt Pettit (6-3, 282, r-Fr.)
61 Kyle Chung (6-3, 290, r-So.)

RIGHT GUARDS

72 Augie Conte (6-5, 302, r-Jr.)
75 Alston Smith (6-1, 295, r-Jr.)
74 Braxton Pfaff (6-5, 294, r-Fr.)

RIGHT TACKLES

77 Wade Hansen (6-5, 299, r-Sr.)
52 Darius Redman (6-4, 291, r-Sr.)
76 Austin Clark (6-6, 308, Fr.)

and McLaughlin came out of spring as the projected starting tackles, with Wyatt Teller and Augie Conte manning the guard positions and Eric Gallo taking over at center.

Teller came off the bench for the first half of last season, and he played so well that Searels inserted him in the starting lineup for the Miami game. Teller never left the starting lineup after that, and his play settled an offensive line that actually played fairly well down the stretch when the Hokies won three of their final four games.

Teller gives the Hokies an intense, physical presence on the interior. His nastiness as a player rubs off on the rest of the unit.

“Coach Searels made a tape for us to watch at the end of the season, and he [Teller] was in there throwing guys around,” Hansen said. “It was cool to watch. It creates an atmosphere that this is what all of us need to do. We all have to be able to throw people around like this. It can’t be just one person, so it brings up the energy level and motivates us.”

Gallo goes into the season as the starter at center after a fantastic spring. He played sparingly last season as a true freshman, but came in and played like a senior this spring.

Searels, though, needs for depth to emerge. Ideally, he wants to find someone



with the ability to play multiple interior spots, and he also wants to find a tackle with the ability to play both tackle positions.

He liked what he saw from Darius Redman, a fifth-year senior who was moved from tight end to tackle before spring practice started, and freshman Yosuah Nijman showed promise after enrolling in January. Tyrell Smith, another January enrollee, showed good footwork and power. Both Alston Smith and Parker Osterloh bring a little experience.

But the success of the offense probably hinges on that first unit and whether those players can pave the way for the running game to work effectively the way it worked at the end of last year. Also, they know they need to protect Tech’s quarterbacks better.

“[Michael] Brewer can’t get hit like he did last year,” Hansen said. “He took a beating, and he’s one of the toughest guys I’ve ever met. I’ve seen the hits he’s taken, and that can’t happen again. We need to take care of him. If we take care of him, he’ll lead us where we want to go.”

Hansen is optimistic about the offensive line, and so, too, are his teammates. His play, and the way this unit gelled throughout the spring, should give Hokie Nation reason for optimism for a more consistent unit this fall as well.




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Ken Ekanem

EKANEM quietly a leader on talented defensive line

by Jimmy Robertson

Dadi Nicolas was an All-ACC choice last year and is on three awards “watch” lists this preseason. Everyone knows that Luther Maddy ranks as a defensive line stud, and the coaching staff loves Corey Marshall, a tough disruptor on the interior who has turned his career around.

But is Hokie Nation aware that Ken Ekanem almost quietly led the team in sacks last season?

“I got lucky,” Ekanem said. “I got a lot of help from my teammates. Bud Foster [Tech’s defensive coordinator] called all the right plays and all the right blitzes. I’m just a product of the system.”

Ekanem sells himself short. He’s much more than a product of the system. He’s a darn fine player and worthy of the accolades just as much as his teammates on what figures to be a dominant defensive front this

A QUICK GLANCE

Returning starters: Luther Maddy (33 career starts), Dadi Nicolas (14 career starts), Corey Marshall (14 career starts), Ken Ekanem (13 career starts)

Starters lost: none

Projected new starters: none

Top reserves: Nigel Williams, Woody Baron, Seth Dooley, Vinny Mihota, Steve Sobczak

Newcomers: Mihota, Sobczak

Breakout candidate: Nicolas

Notes: All four of Tech’s projected starting defensive linemen have earned All-ACC honors at some point in their careers ... The Hokies led the ACC in sacks last season with 48 and ranked fourth nationally ... Tech’s defensive line combined for 25.5 of the Hokies’ 48 sacks last season ... Tech’s rush defense ranked 39th nationally (144.8 ypg) ... Five of Ekanem’s 9.5 sacks came in the Hokies’ wins over UNC and Virginia ... Nicolas was twice named ACC Defensive Lineman of the Week last season ... Maddy earned honorable mention All-ACC honors despite playing in just four games ... Maddy has played in more games than anyone on Tech’s roster (43).

2015 FALL DEPTH CHART

DEFENSIVE LINE

STUD ENDS

90 Dadi L’homme Nicolas (6-3, 225, r-Sr.)

99 Vinny Mihota (6-5, 271, r-Fr.)

ENDS

4 Ken Ekanem (6-2, 246, r-Jr.)

43 Seth Dooley (6-4, 273, r-So.)

93 Jeremy Haynes (6-3, 224, r-Jr.)

NOSE TACKLES

92 Luther Maddy (6-1, 285, r-Sr.)

60 Woody Baron (6-1, 273, Jr.)

98 Ricky Walker (6-1, 285, So.)

TACKLES

96 Corey Marshall (6-2, 268, r-Sr.)

95 Nigel Williams (6-2, 295, r-Jr.)

91 Steve Sobczak (6-0, 312, r-Fr.)

upcoming season.

Ekanem not only led the team with 9.5 sacks, but he also finished second on the squad with 14.5 tackles for a loss behind Nicolas’ 18.5. He finished third in quarterback hurries with 19 behind Nicolas (35) and Marshall (23).

He produced all that despite playing with a torn labrum in his shoulder that required surgery following the season.

“I messed it up during camp [in August], and it progressively got worse,” Ekanem said. “I waited until after the season to get the surgery because I didn’t want to miss any time during the season.

“I’m lucky that a lot of my surgeries are in the offseason and not during the season. If I miss spring ball, then so be it. I’m just glad it was the offseason and not during the season.”

Three members of that defensive line – Ekanem, Marshall and Maddy – missed spring practice with injuries. Marshall played with an ankle injury last season and elected to get surgery following the bowl game. Maddy played in the first four games, but suffered a knee injury that ultimately cost him the season. He received a medical hardship waiver to return for a fifth season.

Maddy and Marshall anchor Tech’s defense from the tackle positions. Marshall recorded 41 tackles (9.5 for a loss) and 4.5 sacks last season. In 2013, Maddy recorded 55 tackles (13.5 for a loss) and 6.5 sacks on his way to earning third-team All-ACC honors.

Tech possesses depth behind these two. Nigel Williams started 10 games last season and finished with 9.5 tackles for a loss and 4.5 sacks. Woody Baron started twice last season and has played in 25 career games, and Ricky Walker played in 11 games as a true

freshman. Redshirt freshman Steve Sobczak shows potential as well. So a talented player is not going to make the dress squad, as Tech’s staff figures to dress five defensive tackles.

Nicolas and Ekanem form a terrific tandem at the end positions. Nicolas earned second-team All-ACC honors a year ago after recording 72 tackles and nine sacks. Ekanem pitched in 53 tackles to go with his 9.5 sacks, thus giving the Hokies two productive players at these spots.

Ekanem’s production came as a surprise to some considering he recorded just three tackles as a redshirt freshman - but not to him.

“Not really,” he said. “I always pride myself on being a good pass rusher, and I knew that I would have a lot of opportunities because my teammates would free me up. If you focus on me, Dadi is going to get free. If you focus on Dadi, I’m going to get free. And we have some athletic defensive tackles, too, so they [offenses] have to pick their poison.”

Depth, though, could be an issue at the end spots. Seth Dooley played in 13 games a year ago and got plenty of reps this spring in Ekanem’s absence. Other than Dooley, though, no other end has played in a collegiate game.


That said, defensive line coach Charley

Wiles loves the potential of Vinny Mihota, who played very well this spring. In fact, Wiles considered Mihota to be among his top eight defensive linemen coming out of spring practice.

Tech returns a lot of talent on the defensive line. Some speculate that this could be among Frank Beamer’s best groups, and it’s not hard to see why. The experience and talent create some lofty expectations.

But this unit knows that they need to produce – games aren’t won on paper. They also know they need to stay healthy.

“Three of our starting defensive linemen were hurt during the spring, but Nigel was a part-time starter last year,” Ekanem said. “We got a lot of our backups a lot of reps, guys like Seth. He’s coming along pretty well. Vinny and all the backup defensive tackles are coming along, and we’re excited about that. They all really improved during spring ball.

“We’re not losing that much on defense. We lose Chase Williams [at mike linebacker], but Andrew Motuapuaka got some experience when Chase got hurt last year. All our defensive backs are experienced, and they’re interchangeable. I think we’re stacked on both sides of the ball, so I’m very excited about the season.” 

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Andrew
Motuapuaka

MOTUAPUAKA ready to take charge of Tech defense from linebacker spot *by Jimmy Robertson*

Andrew Motuapuaka had the feelings one might expect when he went into the game against Pittsburgh last season following Chase Williams' knee injury. He felt a rush.

He also learned something fairly quickly. "That week, I didn't really pay attention to the game plan as much as I should have because I didn't think I would get into the game," he said. "When I got thrown into the game, I was like, 'Oh, wow, I should have paid attention.' I knew the basic stuff, but I hadn't paid attention to the details, and they [the Panthers] were picking on me."

Like all good players, though, Motuapuaka got better. He started the next game against Miami and recorded 11 tackles (five solo). He started again the following week and recorded 14 tackles.

He ended up starting two more games and finished with no fewer than 10 tackles in either game. Williams returned for the regular-season finale against Virginia, but by then, defensive coordinator Bud Foster knew what he had in Motuapuaka.

"As the games went on, the game started to slow down, and I felt more comfortable," Motuapuaka said. "I started playing the game and having fun. That's when I started to play better."

"In the game, you get winded pretty quick. Your heart is beating, and you're so excited. At

the same time, you're running around all over the place. The way I play, wherever the ball is, that's where I like to be. I hustle to the ball. So those first few games, I wasn't in game shape, and the only way to get into game shape is to get into games and get that experience."

Williams' departure leaves the mike linebacker spot in the hands of Motuapuaka, who solidified himself as the starter this spring. Those four games that he started worked wonders with his confidence, and he took control of Tech's defense this spring.

Foster never doubted Motuapuaka's physical abilities. The young man likes to be in the middle of the action and probably ranks as the best tackler on the squad. Foster, though, wanted to see Motuapuaka become more familiar with the scheme, and more importantly, become more vocal.

Middle linebackers need to be the leaders of the defense. The soft-spoken Motuapuaka needed to take charge.

"At first, it was tough," he said. "I'm not really a vocal person, but I enjoy running the defense and getting people lined up. It slows me down, and I like to know what everybody is doing."

"I don't feel any pressure [about being the leader of the defense]. I'm excited to see what's going to happen this season."

Motuapuaka needs to stay healthy because

A QUICK GLANCE

Returning starters: Deon Clarke (13 career starts)

Starter lost: Chase Williams (10 career starts)

Projected new starter: Andrew Motuapuaka

Top reserves: Carson Lydon, Sean Huelskamp, Jamieon Moss, Raymon Minor

Newcomers: Lydon, Minor

Breakout candidate: Motuapuaka

Notes: Motuapuaka averaged 11.3 tackles per game in his four starts a year ago ... Clarke and Dadi Nicolas were the only two Tech players last season to record at least 70 tackles, 10 tackles for a loss and five sacks ... Moss is the only reserve scholarship linebacker to have played in a collegiate game ... All 121 of Moss' snaps last season came on special teams.

2015 FALL DEPTH CHART

LINEBACKERS

MIKE LINEBACKERS

54 Andrew Motuapuaka (6-0, 231, r-So.)

44 Carson Lydon (6-2, 234, Fr.)

53 Trent Young (5-10, 211, r-Fr.)

56 Sean Huelskamp (6-1, 208, r-So.)

BACKERS

40 Deon Clarke (6-2, 229, Sr.)

50 Jamieon Moss (6-1, 212, r-So.)

18 Raymon Minor (6-2, 223, r-Fr.)


35 Dahman McKinnon (6-1, 221, r-Jr.)

the Hokies lack experience behind him. Carson Lydon enrolled in January and went through growing pains this spring, and Sean Huelskamp is coming off a torn ACL suffered against Ohio State last year.

At backer, the other inside linebacker spot, Deon Clarke returns, and he brings a playmaking mentality to the position. He finished second on the team with 74 tackles last season, including 11 for a loss. He also had five sacks.

Foster likes the potential of both Jamieon Moss and Raymon Minor, who are behind Clarke. Moss brings a little more experience, as Minor took a redshirt year last year, and Moss potentially could play mike linebacker in an emergency.

Clarke and Motuapuaka are the terrific duo for these positions. Their play will go a long way toward determining just how good this Tech defense will be.

"I think we can be No. 1 in the nation," Motuapuaka said. "I can't wait to see what's going to happen. We've got a great chance to have a great defense and a good team. The offense is coming around as well. We're going in the right direction." 

Whip linebacker VANDYKE hoping senior season one to remember *by Jimmy Robertson*

Tech fans have come to expect Ronny Vandyke to spend some portion of his summer helping others, and further investigation reveals that he lived up to that expectation.

Vandyke, active in Tech's chapter of Fellowship of Christian Athletes, spent a week in July visiting with a group of young people at an FCA camp in Richmond. It turned out to be a rewarding experience, both for him and those in attendance.

"It was phenomenal just to be there and allow God to use me to work in those kids' lives," Vandyke said. "Most of them come from the inner city, and most of them don't have a father in the house or don't know their father or don't have a good relationship with their father. I was just trying to be that for them and just show them love."

In addition to helping others, he now hopes to help the Hokies this fall.

Vandyke has dealt with numerous injuries throughout the course of his career, but he now feels healthy and primed for a big senior season. He saw extensive action as a sophomore, playing in 13 games, with two starts, and he recorded 21 tackles, including two for a loss. But last year, he saw action on defense in just one game (Western Michigan). His other plays came on special teams.

He solidified the whip position this spring, taking over for productive Derek Di Nardo, who


graduated after last season after making several big plays in limited time last fall.

"This past spring was probably my best spring since I've been here," Vandyke said. "Maybe it's because I'm a senior and everything is coming together. I don't know. I felt really good coming out of spring ball this year and look forward to this season."

The Hokies sorely lack depth behind Vandyke. In fact, none of the other players on the depth chart have played a snap in a game at this position.

Holland Fisher, a highly touted recruit in 2013, took a redshirt year in 2014, and Tech's staff moved Anthony Shegog to whip following spring practice. Shegog, previously a rover, played in six games last season, seeing action on just 16 plays on defense (his other 41 plays came on special teams).

Hopefully Vandyke lives up to his potential, and more importantly, stays healthy. Defensive coordinator Bud Foster plays a lot of nickel defense (five defensive backs), but he played Di Nardo on 318 plays a year ago, so he still sees a lot of value in the position.

"I'm just trying to be a team player, and whatever my role is, I'll accept it," Vandyke said. "I'll come at it with a good attitude, whatever my role is, so that we can win games. That's what it comes down to." 

A QUICK GLANCE

Returning starter: none

Starter lost: Derek Di Nardo (five career starts)

Projected new starter: Ronny Vandyke (two career starts)

Top reserves: Holland Fisher, Anthony Shegog

Newcomer: Fisher

Breakout candidate: Vandyke

Notes: Vandyke's 326 plays on special teams last season led the team ... Vandyke finished with eight tackles last season, six of which came on special teams ... Vandyke finished second on the team in special teams tackles (Sam Rogers).

2015 FALL DEPTH CHART

WHIP LINEBACKERS

37 Ronny Vandyke (6-3, 215, r-Sr.)

29 Holland Fisher (6-1, 189, r-Fr.)

24 Anthony Shegog (6-1, 213, r-So.)

35 Quinton Taylor (6-0, 221, r-Jr.)

38 Johnathan Galante (5-11, 209, r-So.)

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Brandon Facyson

FACYSON'S return key to lining up all the pieces in Tech defensive backfield

by Jimmy Robertson

This seems hard to believe, but the last time Brandon Facyson played a game fully healthy was the Sun Bowl in El Paso on the final day of 2013.

He injured his shin early on in spring practice of 2014 and missed the rest of the spring. He tried to come back last August, but the injury still bothered him, so he ended up sitting out the remainder of the season after playing in three games and applying for a medical hardship waiver, which he received. Then, toward the end of the season, he broke his leg in practice, which in turn, caused him to miss all of spring practice this spring.

"You're right," Facyson said. "I haven't been able to do much over the past year but rehab."

Facyson represents an important piece toward putting together the puzzle that is Tech's secondary. A healthy Facyson at cornerback allows defensive backs coach Torrian Gray to move other pieces into different spots to build the best possible unit.

But Gray needs to see that player emerge in preseason practices. He wants to see the Facyson who exploded onto the field as a true freshman – the one who worked his way into

the starting lineup and intercepted five passes and broke up eight others.

Facyson feels like he's close to getting back to that level.

"I'm getting back to my old self," he said. "I'm a lot better than what I felt maybe a year ago. I feel 10 times better. I'm still progressing. I'm continuing my rehab. I'm doing everything necessary to get back to 100 percent. It's just a process. I'm taking it easy, taking it slow, but still doing everything with the team. I'm making all my times [in conditioning tests]. I'm steadily progressing."

"I was very disappointed at missing the season, but life goes on. It was unfortunate that I broke my leg toward the end of the year, but after a while, you get to the point where you don't need to sulk any more. I gave myself a couple of days and then I went back to work. I just need to keep my faith and do everything I need to do to get back."

A healthy Facyson teaming with Kendall Fuller on the other side gives Gray arguably the best cornerback tandem in the country. Fuller earned All-America honors a year ago by six different outlets after recording 54 tackles,

A QUICK GLANCE

Returning starters: Kendall Fuller (25 career starts), Chuck Clark (13 career starts), Brandon Facyson (12 career starts)

Starters lost: Detrick Bonner (43 career starts), Kyshoen Jarrett (38 career starts)

Projected new starters: Desmond Frye, Donovan Riley (seven career starts)

Top reserves: Greg Stroman, Mook Reynolds, Terrell Edmunds, Adonis Alexander

Newcomers: Reynolds, Edmunds, Alexander, Shawn Payne

Breakout candidate: Clark

Notes: Bonner and Jarrett combined for 81 starts, 456 tackles (23.5 for a loss) and 10 interceptions in their careers ... The Hokies were 14th nationally in pass efficiency defense last season ... Tech ranked 25th nationally in passing yards allowed (199 ypg) ... Tech allowed only five of its 13 opponents to throw for more than 200 yards ... Only three opponents threw two touchdown passes or more (ECU, BC, Cincinnati) ... Fuller was on four different award "watch lists" in the preseason ... Fuller has started all but one of the Hokies' games the past two seasons ... Clark recorded a career-high 11 tackles in Tech's upset of then-No. 8 Ohio State ... Clark's lone career interception came in the Tech's win over Cincinnati in the Military Bowl.

2015 FALL DEPTH CHART

DEFENSIVE BACKS

BOUNDARY CORNERBACK

- 11 Kendall Fuller (6-0, 194, Jr.)
- 17 Shawn Payne (6-2, 187, r-Fr.)
- 12 Erikk Banks (5-9, 175, r-So.)

RIGHT CORNERBACKS

- 31 Brandon Facyson (6-2, 194, r-So.)
- 6 Mook Reynolds (6-0, 177, Fr.)
- 27 Curtis Williams (5-9, 169, r-So.)

NICKEL BACK

- 3 Greg Stroman (5-11, 168, So.)
- 36 Adonis Alexander (6-3, 189, Fr.)

FREE SAFETIES

- 19 Chuck Clark (6-0, 203, Jr.)
- 22 Terrell Edmunds (6-1, 196, r-Fr.)
- 16 Greg Jones (6-2, 206, r-Jr.)

ROVERS

- 26 Desmond Frye (6-1, 185, r-Jr.)
- 2 Donovan Riley (5-11, 212, Sr.)
- 23 Der'Woun Greene (5-10, 187, r-Jr.)

two interceptions – one that he returned for a touchdown – and 15 pass breakups.

A third cornerback, Chuck Clark, emerged this spring, and he may have been the best

player on the field. Clark started 11 games a year ago, flipping between nickel back and cornerback, and he finished third on the team with 73 tackles. He played great this spring, but Gray wants to move Clark to free safety, where the Hokies lost a stalwart in Detrick Bonner, a three-year starter. Greg Stroman's emergence this spring gives Gray depth at cornerback, thus creating the desire to move Clark.

Still, Tech has options on the back end. Desmond Frye returns after playing in just two games last season because of a shoulder injury (he received a medical hardship waiver), and Gray moved Donovan Riley, who has played in 38 games in his career, from cornerback to free safety this spring, giving him some reps to build depth. Those two figure to battle for the starting job at rover in place of Kyshoen Jarrett, another three-year starter. Tech also lost the services of C.J. Reavis, who was dismissed from the university for an undisclosed violation of policy.


Der'Woun Greene has played on the back end, too, though Gray played him mostly at nickel back this spring. Also, Gray thinks highly of freshmen Mook Reynolds and Adonis Alexander – both enrolled in January. Both worked at cornerback, but Alexander possesses a Kam Chancellor-like frame, and it's not out of the realm to think of moving him

to the back end.

"Bonner and Kyshoen were very important parts to our defense," Facyson said. "They graduated and moved on to bigger things. I think we have the skill to replace guys like that when they leave, and I have full confidence in our defensive backfield. I never didn't have confidence in us. I think we have great upside, even though we're young for the most part. We're very competitive. We're all eager to learn. I think we'll be OK – better than OK."

A year ago, Tech's defensive backs intercepted nine passes, a small number considering the talent level. But the Hokies, as a defense, allowed just 199 yards passing per game and only 13 touchdown passes.

Fans should expect even better numbers this season. The entire defensive line returns, and the pressure from those four make things much easier on a secondary. That, combined with the talent in this defensive backfield, only adds to the reasoning.

"When you have a great defensive line and great coaches coaching them, it's definitely a plus being in the secondary," Facyson agreed. "Quarterbacks don't really have the time that they'd like to have to throw the ball. They [the defensive line] make us better, and we make them better. If we work together, we can have one of the top defenses in the nation." 



Kendall Fuller

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by
Jimmy Robertson

HUGHES healthy after back injury led to trying 2014 season

Most of those knowledgeable on all matters pertaining to Tech football just assumed that A.J. Hughes had a bad 2014.

Further investigation revealed the reason.

Hughes underwent back surgery to repair a herniated disk in his lower spine two weeks after Tech's victory over Cincinnati in the Military Bowl. He actually injured his back before the season, which led to the subpar campaign.

"I think it was pretty evident," he said. "The numbers don't lie. It was pretty bad. I really didn't have any mobility in my right leg. I couldn't move it very much. It affected a lot of things."

"But I wanted to play. I've got a never-give-up attitude. I thought I could get through it, and I kind of did. I feel great now. Everything is back to normal, and I'm excited for the season to start."

Hughes averaged 39.9 yards per punt on 83 punts. He placed 22 inside the 20-yard line and had 13 punts of 50 yards or more. All those numbers represented career lows or tied for career lows.

Now healthy, Hughes anticipates a huge senior season. He has set lofty goals for himself – he wants to lead the nation in punting. Last year's leader, JK Scott of Alabama, averaged 48 yards per punt.


"I'm full go," he said. "Obviously, there are

a few restrictions as far as the weight room goes. You can't load your spine up too much after undergoing a surgery like that. I've been running and working out. I've been running with the skill group, trying to get my legs right and get back at it.

"I've been punting for the past two months. I've been working out in the new indoor facility. I've already hit the roof a few times. I'm looking forward to it [the season]."

His return to form would leave the Hokies in very good shape from a special teams perspective. Kicker Joey Slye returns after a season in which he made 20 of 28 field-goal attempts, and he also kicked off 27 times. Mitchell Ludwig provides depth at punter and as the kickoff specialist, and Eddie D'Antuono returns as the snapper.

In the return game, Greg Stroman returns after a freshman year in which he averaged 6.9 yards per punt return, and he returned one 88 yards for a touchdown in the spring game. Tech needs to find a kickoff returner, but has quality candidates in Travon McMillian, J.C. Coleman, Trey Edmunds and Steven Peoples.

Tech coach Frank Beamer wants to see improvement on special teams in 2015. All this experience returning should enable him to get what he wants. 

A QUICK GLANCE

Returning starters: A.J. Hughes (39 career starts), Joey Slye (13 career starts), Eddie D'Antuono (26 career starts)

Starters lost: none

Projected new starters: none

Reserves: Mitchell Ludwig, Michael Santamaria, Colton Taylor

Newcomers: TBD

Notes: Hughes' 83 punts led the ACC last season ... His total yardage (3,314) ranked second in the ACC ... Slye's 28 field-goal attempts were tied for second in the league and his 20 field goals made were fourth ... Ludwig played in seven games in 2014 – all on kickoffs.

2015 FALL DEPTH CHART

SPECIAL TEAMS

PUNTERS

27 A.J. Hughes (6-0, 201, Sr.)

30 Mitchell Ludwig (5-11, 195, Jr.)

2 Michael Santamaria (5-9, 165, r-Fr.)

KICKERS

46 Joey Slye (5-10, 213, So.)

2 Michael Santamaria (5-9, 165, r-Fr.)

SNAPPERS

59 Eddie D'Antuono (6-5, 266, r-Jr.)

65 Colton Taylor (6-0, 226, r-So.)

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W.M. Jordan Company wrapped up construction on Virginia Tech's new indoor practice facility in June, and Forty-Nine Degrees installed a graphics package and banners to complete the facility project, which began last August.

The \$21.3 million venture features a building that is 210 feet wide and 400 feet long and has an artificial surface installed by Shaw Sports Turf. The synthetic turf is the same used by the NFL's Baltimore Ravens at M&T Bank Stadium, the Ravens' home.

The height from the playing surface to the bottom of the steel ceiling trusses is more than 86 feet at its apex, thus allowing plenty of room for punting and kicking. The building's eight-foot padded walls, wide sidelines, full scoreboard and 40-second clocks on each end allow the football program to hold a full-contact scrimmage.

In addition, the facility features garage-type doors, which open quickly and allow the players to move rapidly from the outdoor practice field into the indoor facility in the


event of inclement weather. The facility also features an elevated video platform that runs the entire length of the field and an elevated coaches' platform in the center of the field.

"It's good knowing you've got the best indoor facility in the country," Tech football coach Frank Beamer said. "It will take your breath away. Inside, it's high, and outside, you have the pylons, with service, loyalty and those things [the same core values on the pylons at Virginia Tech's War Memorial Court] ... and just the whole design of it.

"I think it's the best indoor facility in the country. Where it's located for us, it's handy next to our practice field and our stadium. I can sit in my office and see every facility we've got. We've been fortunate. We can go in there and function and scrimmage. It gives you a lot of flexibility. It's a great thing to have."

Other teams and student-athletes will benefit from the massive structure as well. The athletics department envisions men's and women's soccer, softball, baseball and

lacrosse all using the building for training and conditioning purposes, particularly during inclement weather in late winter and early spring.

The Hokie Club staff has raised more than \$20.2 million for the new practice facility, and staff members continue to work hard to secure the rest along with raising funds for the Rector Field House renovation project. Those wishing to contribute can contact the Hokie Club office (540-231-6618). 

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HOKIES HOPE 2015 SEASON *a Keeper*

Murielle Tiernan, who has scored 25 career goals in two years, has started every match since arriving in Blacksburg.

The Tech women's soccer team made it to the Sweet 16 last season for the second straight year, and with players like Ashley Meier, Murielle Tiernan and Jordan Coburn returning, they have expectations of doing that and more this season

by Jimmy Robertson

Earlier this summer, David Teel, a well-respected columnist from The Daily Press in the Newport News/Hampton area, gave a thoughtful analysis of Tech's sports, and he tabbed the women's soccer program as the best bet for winning the school's first national championship.

Head coaches often cringe as such predictions, but Chugger Adair, who has built the Tech women's soccer team into a national power, took a pragmatic view of Mr. Teel's prognosis.

"It is very flattering that he [Teel] would think high enough of us to give us consideration for that, for sure, and I think it's a testament to what the girls have done here," he said. "But I don't focus on that. I just focus on the daily process of trying to make us as good as we can be each day.

"Sometimes, that's probably a good thing, and sometimes that's probably a grind from the girls' aspect, but we work hard in the offseason, and we, as coaches, try to develop the girls and develop the team overall. We just hope we can put a run together each year and be in contention."

Adair's Hokies made a run to the Sweet 16 last season—their second straight such appearance—before falling to then-No. 8 Penn State 2-1 on the Nittany Lions' home field. Tech's loss to Penn State concluded the 2014 campaign, as the Hokies finished with a 16-6 record that included a 5-5 mark in ACC play.

The Sweet 16 appearance marked their third appearance in the Sweet 16 as a program in four years. But the loss to the Nittany Lions left the Hokies disappointed—they expected more after advancing to the College Cup in 2013 before falling to Florida State in a national semifinal.

That feeling of disappointment shows just how much the Hokies have matured as a program.

"I think the girls wanted more," Adair admitted. "But they left it all on the field, and I couldn't ask for more. We were a bit unlucky. The game could have gone either way. Penn State was a good side. We were a good side. We made one or two little mistakes, and they capitalized. We had one or two chances. I thought it was a competitive

game that could have went either way."

For Tech to return to that point—a place it wants to get to annually now—it needs to find some pieces to replace some rather valuable parts. The Hokies lost six seniors, all of whom played critical roles. In fact, that senior class was the first senior class to post at least 13 wins in all four years of competition and the first senior class to win at least 60 career games (62).

Shannon Mayrose, the glue of the team, finished second in goals with eight, and Katie Yensen finished tied for second in assists with six. Midfielders Ellie Zoepfl and Kelsey Loupee worked seamlessly with Ashley Meier and Murielle Tiernan to give Tech a potent offense. Defenders Jodie Zelenky and Danielle King got little publicity, but their gritty, tough natures spearheaded a stingy Tech defense.

"Good players, good people and good leaders," Adair summarized of the seniors. "The mentality they had here was huge for us. That was a key to our success."

But the Hokies do return some serious firepower in the form of Meier and Tiernan, two All-ACC performers. Meier—who has been named to the All-ACC team every year of her career—scored the game-winning goal in overtime against Georgetown that propelled the Hokies into the Sweet 16. She finished with seven goals on the season, while Tiernan, the Hokies' lone first-team All-ACC choice, scored a team-best 14.

Meier, though, serves as the unquestioned leader of this roster. She controls things from the midfield, and she spent the summer competing with the U.S.'s U23 development team, which went to Norway and played three games. She figures to be even better this season.

"She's very important to us," Adair said of Meier. "She has athleticism and an uncanny ability to score goals and do some special things for us. She covers a lot of ground, and she works hard. She's a worker, and sometimes we have to manage that work throughout the season to keep her engine going. She's very mentally strong, very athletic and very dangerous."

Meier and Tiernan will have some help on the offensive end of the field. Candace Cephers returns after scoring six goals last season, and Alani Johnson scored

“It is very flattering that he would think high enough of us to give us consideration for that, for sure, and I think it's a testament to what the girls have done here. But I don't focus on that. I just focus on the daily process of trying to make us as good as we can be each day.”

— Tech women's soccer coach Chugger Adair on one writer's tabbing of his team to be the safe bet to win the school's first national title

five. Bria Dixon and Madi Conyers, scored four and three, respectively. Laila Gray scored twice and had three assists.

This group gives the Hokies the potential to be as potent as last year's unit. In 22 games last year, Tech amassed a record-breaking 62 goals and was sixth in the NCAA in scoring offense, averaging 2.62 goals per game. And that came in a season after Jazmine Reeves, arguably the best player in the program's history, had graduated.

But it fits with Adair's philosophy. He likes for his squad to attack and score.

"It's more fun," he said. "We're not afraid to keep possession when we need to, but we've learned over the years that there are times when we need to be more direct."

"The last two years, we've had good depth up front and we could put players in, and the kids off the bench were proven goal scorers as well. I think we're trying to find that a little bit now. Who's going to replace Mayrose in that aspect?

We do have some capable players. We have some players who can get forward and get into the attack and can create on their own and in combination play, so that's a good thing."

On defense, the Hokies need to find replacements for Zelenky and King, but Jordan Coburn returns to oversee things on the back end, along with senior Morgan Conklin. Coburn, a two-time All-ACC choice, and Conklin, who started every game last season in a defensive midfield role, were

primary reasons that Tech's defense recorded 12 shutouts in 2014.

The Hokies' defense, as a whole, got overshadowed by that powerful offense. But Tech set a school record for fewest goals allowed in a season – 18 – and that made Adair just as proud as his team's offensive explosions.

"If you look at shots and saves, our goalkeepers didn't have to do much," Adair said. "It [great defense] was done from our team defending, and I'm proud of that. That mentality is something we instill in our group. I don't think we even faced a lot of shots. When you think about it, you think about getting numbers behind the ball, tackling, supporting, but really, a lot of it is possession. When you have the ball a lot, you're not having to defend."

Adair, though, wants to see some defenders emerge to help Coburn and Conklin, and he expects Sydney Curtis, a junior who played a lot last season and made some big plays, and Grace DeGooyer, a transfer from Tennessee, to help. He also likes Jordyn Brock, who has shown the versatility to play several positions.

"She's done a good job," Adair said of Brock. "She's a plugger. She's been in the midfield, outside back, center back ... she's played all around. Gracie DeGooyer is one to watch. We have to mesh her with our system. She's a 6-foot player who can cover ground on that left side. She's lanky and has the ability. She's going

to be someone to watch and hopefully she can solidify that spot.

"Alex Schweitzer [a sophomore from Tampa, Florida] will be one to watch as well. She can play right back or left back. We'll have to see what we do there. Jordan Coburn has been an anchor for us, and she'll have to have another strong year for us."

As Tech's defense comes together during the early portion of the season, it may need to rely on goalkeeper Kaylyn Smith, a sophomore from Monument, Colorado, who took over starting duties toward the end of last season. Adair went with Caroline Kelly before inserting Smith into the lineup, and as a freshman, she started the final six games (seven overall).

Smith finished the season with 26 saves, and the Hokies went 4-2 in that span down the stretch.

"She's mature beyond her years," Adair said. "She's very quiet and unassuming, and she's very good with her feet. She's athletic and quick. She's not the biggest size-wise, but she is quick and athletic and makes up for that with her ability. At the end of the year, she won the starting job and really did a good job. She made some big saves in conference play."


Therein is what Tech will need – big plays in conference action. The Hokies went .500 in league action last season, and Adair expects the ACC, annually one of the best women's soccer conferences in the nation, to be even better.

That means several players need to help the likes of Tiernan, Meier, Coburn and Conklin. In particular, the time has arrived for some of those juniors, like Cephers, Curtis, Dixon and Kallie Pourifoy, a forward from Charleston, South Carolina.

Practice has started – and the answers need to come quickly.

"We have some positions open where people have not been solidified as of yet," Adair said. "We'll look at it and see how we mesh and if we need to change formations and things like that. We may have to mix things up a little more, which is good."

"The girls here have been learning and growing and been part of the culture. If they are ready to step up and embrace that culture, then I think we'll be a solid contender in the conference. I think we're at the point where no one wants to play us. In the old days, they used to look to play us because we were an ACC team that was perceived to be beatable. I don't necessarily believe that's the case any more."

Without question. Yet the Hokies will find out how good they are rather quickly. Tech plays Indiana, West Virginia, Tennessee and Georgetown before taking on the ACC gauntlet. If the Hokies survive those non-conference challenges, they could very well be setting themselves up for another Sweet 16 appearance – and hopefully more. 

FIVEtoWATCH



Laila Gray

Gray scored against Ohio State and finished with seven points on the season. She played a little out of position last year as a midfielder, and coach Chugger Adair may move her up front this season.



Heather Timothy

A freshman, Timothy was a top-100 recruit from Cary, North Carolina, and should play early as an attacking midfielder.



Kallie Pourifoy

She, too, finished with seven points and has gotten better each year. The forward started the final three games of last season, and Adair expects the progression to continue.



Anissa Dadkhah

One of two freshmen from Adair's old stomping grounds in California, Dadkhah possesses the versatility to play anywhere in the midfield.



Bria Dixon

Dixon scored a game-winning goal against Ohio State and a goal against Georgetown in an NCAA game. An injured ankle slowed her at times last year, but she's athletic and dangerous.

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HEADING INTO

2015 SEASON

The Tech men's soccer team returns a lot of talent, depth and promising young players, and head coach Mike Brizendine is excited about his team's potential for success

by Jimmy Robertson



Tech won all five matches in which Ricardo John scored a goal last season.

Asked to give an assessment of the Atlantic Coast Conference in the sport of men's soccer, Mike Brizendine first laughed.

"Just use the same quote from last year," Virginia Tech's head coach said. "You can use it for however long you want. It'll always be the same – a grind."

True enough, as the league features the defending national champion in the Virginia Cavaliers – who actually went into the ACC tournament as the No. 8 seed, showing the depth of the league. Seven teams made the NCAA Championship, with six of the seven winning at least one match.

Tech won just two conference matches a year ago, finishing 7-8-2 overall and 2-5-1 in league play, but Brizendine heads into the 2015 season optimistic about his squad. He graduated just two seniors off last season's roster, returns his top three scorers and his goalkeeper, and sees a few key players return from injuries. This year's roster features a nice blend of American and international players, youth and experience, and depth and talent.

"As I think about this season, most of our guys are returning, and we're returning some very talented players from the top to the bottom, and we have added depth," Brizendine said. "Those are two things we haven't had in a while and two things that are going to help shape us for doing some special things down the road. I'm unbelievably excited."

"We should be much better, but I beefed up the schedule. The reality is I have high expectations of this group for the next two years, and I have a schedule that reflects those expectations. I think that we can have a bigger presence within our conference and on the national scene."

Brizendine's top reason for optimism starts with the return of Ricardo John. The rangy

forward from Trinidad and Tobago played in all 17 matches as a freshman, starting 13 of them. He led the Hokies with five goals and tied for the team lead with 11 points.

John, who played in the Pan American Games this summer, was the Hokies' only All-ACC player a year ago, earning third-team honors. He also made the league's All-Freshman Team.

"He can do a lot of things for us, but we're a better team and he's better when Som's [Essomé] on the field and some of the other guys we have in that attacking group," Brizendine said. "It takes pressure off of him. When Som was missing some of those games, that's when Ricardo really came out of his

"I can't imagine us having to play a game without him. He's a guy that not very many people will notice. But if you're out there training or watching every game or breaking down video, you see the importance of that kid. He's blue-collar. He's tough. He wins balls. He's not intimidated. I can't imagine putting a lineup out there without him in it."

– Tech head coach Mike Brizendine on Collin Verfurth

shell. That's what we're excited about.

"We didn't get to see both of those guys at their best together. Ricardo was finding his way in September, and then in October, we saw the best of him. Now it didn't necessarily translate into us winning games, but he came a long way in that time."

Essomé, another forward, missed four games, but still tied John for the team lead in points. The junior from Essen, Germany, scored three goals and added a team-best five assists. Another weapon, Merlin Baus, returns. The sophomore from Bochum, Germany, started 16 matches in the midfield and scored three goals.

Brizendine also gets the services of André Thomas, who took a redshirt season last fall because of a hip injury. The redshirt sophomore from Bad Nauheim, Germany, started all 16 games as a midfielder during his freshman season, scoring two goals and dishing out two assists.

"Special players mean so much," Brizendine said, referring to Thomas. "It's not that he's just a very good athlete and a good soccer player. It's the fact that he's competitive, and he pushes the team to win. He helps lead with his performance. It's not just the tangibles, but also the intangibles that he brings to the table. When you bring a guy like that back – and he was back in the spring – it was a huge difference. He's a big key for us. I can't wait to get him back."

Those four guys alone should help the Hokies become more potent offensively. Tech scored 19 goals last season, but only scored one in its final seven matches, resulting in an 0-5-2 mark down the stretch.

"I think so," Brizendine said when asked if the Hokies would be better offensively. "If you ask people in the league who know our team, they know that they're going to have their



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INSIDE THE NUMBERS



hands full with our attacking group.”

On the other end of the field, Tech figures to be in good shape, as defenders Alessandro Mion, who started all 17 matches, and Jonathan Cruickshank, who started 15, return. Brad Vorv, another defender and one of just two seniors on the squad, started 16 times, and he returns, and Brizendine really likes Ousmane Sanogo, a Senegal native who earned junior-college All-America honors, and Collin Verfurth, who started 13 matches last fall as a freshman.

The Hokies also return goalkeeper Ben Lundgaard, a sophomore from Delaware who started 12 matches last season. He recorded 57 saves and the Hokies went 5-5-2 in matches he started.

“He’s a monster,” Brizendine said. “Anything that is in the air, he goes up and gets. His kicking was a little erratic last year, but if we can get him kicking better – he can kick it a country mile – he has all the tools to play at the next level. He just needs to refine those tools.”

Overall, the Hokies possess a rather youthful roster – they only have two seniors and five juniors. But most of those young players played extensive minutes last season. Brizendine and his staff brought in 11 newcomers (seven freshmen and four transfers), and they expect most of them to take redshirt years because of all the experience returning.

“The thing about that is most of our young guys played last year, and I’m hoping that year will transition us,” he said. “If I had a

bunch of sophomores and they hadn’t played any minutes and I graduated 14 seniors, I would have a different perspective.

“But we started seven new guys last year. They got a lot of playing time. That’s why I wanted to make it tough on them [with the schedule], so that we’re comfortable with tougher games. That’s going to help bring us together as a team. It’s going to mold us in the direction we’re going to go in the next couple of years.”

That direction is hopefully up, as in

the ACC standings. The Hokies, who play Cincinnati, Xavier and West Virginia in non-conference action, haven’t won more than two ACC matches in a season since going to the College Cup in 2007.

The league is ridiculously tough. Just ask the Cavaliers, who finished with a .500 record in conference play before making their run. In fact, Notre Dame went 6-1-1 in league action last year, but in looking at the rest of the league, six other teams were separated by just a loss.

“It’s always going to be the best or one

of the best,” Brizendine said. “The eighth seed in our tournament won the national championship. How many other leagues would have that? It’s unusual. The reality is if you look at last year’s NCAA bracket, we [other ACC teams] get kicked out when we have to play each other in the Elite Eight or Sweet 16.

“But it’s fun. That’s why I like it. Everybody likes it. That’s the challenge. That’s why I’m excited. I can’t wait to play ACC games with this group.”

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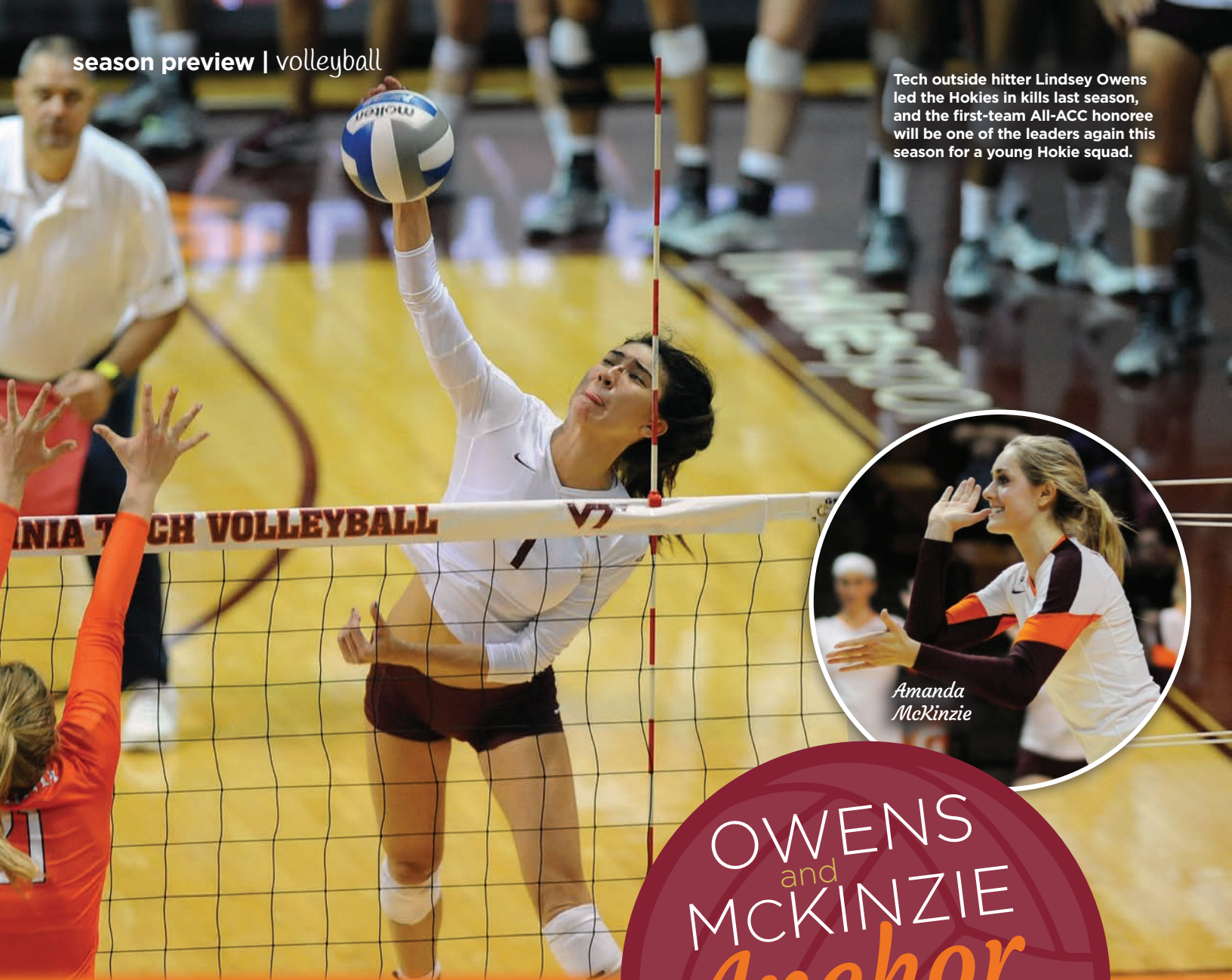
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Tech outside hitter Lindsey Owens led the Hokies in kills last season, and the first-team All-ACC honoree will be one of the leaders again this season for a young Hokie squad.

Amanda McKinzie

OWENS and MCKINZIE *Anchor* TECH VOLLEYBALL SQUAD

The two outside hitters hope to lead a young squad to the Hokies' first NCAA tournament berth since the 2010 season

by **Mary Lee Gibson**
Special to Inside Hokie Sports

With volleyball preseason in full swing, Virginia Tech head coach Chris Riley and his staff are excited for what is to come with the first match on Aug. 28.

The 2015 schedule features five opponents who made the NCAA Championship last season, including LIU Brooklyn, Michigan State, and Atlantic Coast Conference members North Carolina, Miami and Florida State.

"Every match is important," Riley said. "We're focused and have the ability to be prepared to play every team we face. The ACC is a great conference. All the teams are getting better and so are we."

The Hokies are looking to build on last year's campaign after finishing sixth in the ACC with a 10-8 record and 17-14 overall mark, narrowly missing out on the postseason. The 2015 graduating class featured four starters from the squad, but the returners are prepared to step up to the plate to carry the young team to the next level.

"Our two seniors will both play significant roles, and we expect big things from them – leadership because they've been here," Riley said. "But this group has all grown together. So for us, they're all counted on for leadership."

Seniors Kennedy Bryan and Kenedy McGrath have been strong contributors since

they arrived at Tech and will make an impact on the court this season. Bryan and McGrath saw time in 22 and 15 matches, respectively, in 2014.

"We graduated Megan Beckwith, our starting libero, but Kenedy was fantastic in the spring for us. We're expecting her to step into that role and be ready to go," Riley said.

Throughout spring practices and the ones in early fall, the Hokies have relied on their outside hitters, especially 2014 starters Lindsey Owens and Amanda McKinzie, to pave the way for the upcoming season.

Owens and McKinzie return for their junior years after a strong presence on the court in previous seasons. Owens garnered spots on the All-ACC and VaSID (Virginia Sports Information Directors) first teams after attacking with 3.42 kills per set and 312 digs throughout the season. The two-year starter has the potential to eclipse the 1,000-kill mark during the 2015 campaign. McKinzie brings impressive numbers back to the Hokies' squad as well, having tallied 236 kills and 290 digs in her sophomore year.

"Lindsey and Amanda are two very good players," Riley said. "They're the heart and soul of the group when it comes to the on-the-court playing."

Redshirt sophomore Ashley Battle made a significant impact during her first season on the court, as she started all 31 matches last season, collecting 139 total blocks in addition to 186 kills.

"Ashley is a fantastic athlete who is starting to come into her own as a volleyball player. She's a big piece of our team," Riley said.

Tech welcomes several standout recruits to its roster, ones who will add depth in multiple positions for the Hokies. Minnesota native Jaila Tolbert is one of two new middle blockers to join the squad after earning three championship titles during her 2014 club season.

"We're expecting her to contribute to our

team immediately from an offensive and defensive standpoint," Riley said. "She's very athletic and fast, really light off the floor with a great arm."

Cara Cunningham joins the team after spending one year at Villanova, where she led the Wildcats with 128 blocks to tie the program's single-season record. Cunningham has Tech ties, as her sister, Kristen, also played volleyball for the Hokies.

"We're glad Cara wanted to come here," Riley said. "She comes from a great family whom we've known forever, and we're really excited about them being back in Cassell. The Villanova staff did a great job because she's gotten so much better. We're looking forward to her being able to contribute from the defensive side immediately."

Additionally, Riley and his staff brought in two liberos, Alex Toben and Haley Price, to secure a strong future for the program.

"We're looking forward to both of them adding some depth to the position," Riley said. "We're excited about the two young kids and where they're going to take our program."

Tech is coming off a strong offensive year when the Hokies attacked at nearly a three-point margin higher than their opponents. They defeated two nationally ranked teams, including No. 12 Illinois and No. 21 Duke. Despite some tough losses early on in the

season, the Hokies bounced back with six straight wins to end the season – in fact, they won nine of their final 11 matches – to give them a shot at the NCAA Tournament.

"Our hitting numbers were very good last season," Riley said. "We are a very strong serve-receive team. Amanda and Kennedy have carried most of the load with that and did a great job."

Tech finished in the sixth spot in the ACC for blocking with 2.35 blocks per set to total 280 throughout the season. Bringing in two players with solid blocking backgrounds will aid the Hokies' defense in the 2015 season.

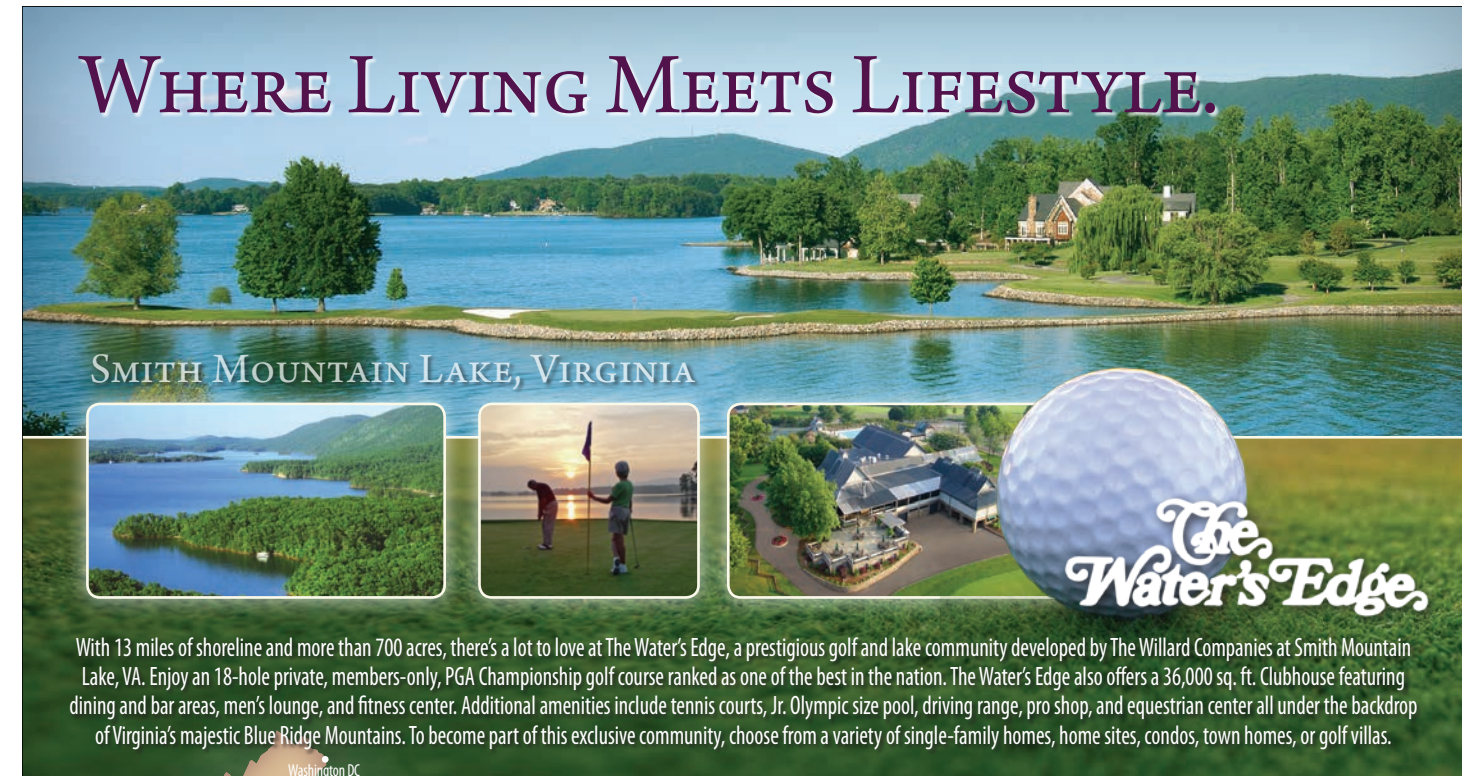
"With our additions, we'll have a strong blocking team as well," Riley said. "I think, if we can be a very good serving team, I think we can be a very good defensive team. Those are our focal points, and we're going to get a lot better at these things."

Looking forward, the Hokies will continue to work toward their long-standing goals to return to the NCAA Championship, as they did in 2010 after falling just short last season.

"We have to be prepared game in, game out to play well and finish in the top part of the conference, so we give ourselves a chance to make the NCAA tournament again," Riley said.

Tech opens the 2015 season with the Radford University/Virginia Tech Invitational on Aug. 28-29 at Cassell Coliseum.

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CROSS COUNTRY TEAMS

LOOKING TO MAKE

A Run

With the return of Thomas Curtin, the Tech men's team has the potential to win an ACC title, and a young women's team has high expectations despite a lack of experience

by Jimmy Robertson

A year ago, expectations were high for the Tech women's cross country team, while the men's squad needed rebuilding.

This season, though, the roles appear to be reversed.

Cross country head coach Ben Thomas is bullish on the Tech men's squad, as the Hokies gear up for the season-opening meet on Sept. 4. A year ago, the men finished sixth at the ACC Championships, but the Hokies were without the services of Thomas Curtin, who took a redshirt year in cross country but earned three All-America honors in track (in the 3,000- and 5,000-meter runs during the indoor season and the 5,000 during the outdoor season). They also return other experienced runners in redshirt senior Darren Barlow, redshirt junior Stuart Robertson and juniors Neil Gourley and Patrick Joseph.

Curtin, one of five seniors on the team, headlines the group and gives the Hokies a bona fide threat to win the individual title. He finished second at the ACC Cross Country Championships in 2013, and while successful on the track, he probably possesses more

potential for greatness in cross country.

"It traditionally has been his strongest venue," Thomas said. "Now with the track season he just had, we're very excited about the potential he has for cross [country]. Staying healthy, staying consistent from here on, I think he's as good as anybody in the NCAA. He's a top-10 guy at NCAAs if he can do that – stay healthy and consistent from here on."

Thomas knows, though, that Curtin needs to get help from the others for Tech to win the ACC. In 2012, Will Mulherin won the individual title for the Hokies, but guys like Curtin, Brayden Burleigh, Michael Hammond and Leoule Degfae all finished in the top 22, giving Tech the points it needed to win its first ever team crown. Barlow, Robertson, Gourley, Joseph and perhaps others now need to follow suit for similar success.

Robertson served as Tech's top runner last season while Curtin took the redshirt year, and he finished 21st at the ACC meet. He went on to earn all-region honors after finishing 17th at the NCAA Southeast Regional. Joseph and Barlow

finished 25th and 30th, respectively at the regionals. Gourley, a native of Glasgow, Scotland, came in 43rd at his first ACC meet, but ran well during track season and fared well at the European U23 Championships this summer.

"That's a top five I'd put up against anybody on a given day," Thomas said. "On paper, this is probably the most talented group we've had since 2012, the last time we were able to win. This is our best shot since then. Now, on the other hand, the league has gotten considerably stronger since then, with the addition of Syracuse, Notre Dame and Louisville. They all bring strong distance runners into the mix.

"We have a chance. If the summer continues to go as well as its going, and so far it's gone pretty well - and that's such a big part of cross country - and we have a good September and October, we'll have a chance to be in the mix at ACCs."

On the women's side, Thomas faces a rebuilding job. A year ago, the Hokies, with a veteran lineup, enjoyed one of the best seasons in school history. They finished sixth at the ACC Championships and fourth the NCAA Southeast Regionals as a team, and then earned an at-large berth to the NCAA Championships – marking just the program's second appearance in school history.

But seven seniors departed, including four fifth-year seniors. Standouts Sarah Rapp and Paige Kvartunas are gone, and they served as the leaders of the group, particularly late in the season.

So Tech will be young on the women's side. But Thomas still has high expectations.

"You have to be patient, but you also have to instill that there is a level of expectation," Thomas said. "A rebuilding year doesn't mean we're not going after it. We're trying to get there as quickly as we can while keeping them healthy and consistent.

"Hanna Green and Shannon Morton have both been successful in cross [country]. They also came from lower mileage, middle distance backgrounds, and they've developed confidence in their abilities as cross country runners. They're going to be leaders of this group."

Morton, from Chesapeake, Virginia, serves as the top returning runner after earning all-region honors following a 19th-place finish at the NCAA Southeast Regional last fall. She finished 32nd at the ACC meet.

Green is an intriguing cross country option because she dominated on the track as a sophomore this past season. She earned All-America honors in the 800-meter run during both the indoor and outdoor seasons,

claiming third at the NCAA Outdoor Track and Field Championships in June.

A year ago, her best finish in cross country was 19th at the season-opening VT Alumni Invite. She was 70th at the ACC Championships and 42nd at the regional meet.

Can she run longer distances effectively?

"She's going to be a lot better in cross [country] this year," Thomas said. "She's more motivated to do it this year. She likes cross country, and she wants to get into that all-region level. She was 42nd last year. It's not inconceivable that she could be in the top 25."


The rest of the women's lineup, at least heading into the season, remains a bit of a mystery. Abigail Motley returns after competing in six meets last fall, and Tessa Riley becomes eligible after transferring from Wake Forest and sitting out last season – she finished second in the Hokie Open while running unattached. Katie Kennedy, who ran four meets last fall, and Marie Johnston, another transfer from Wake who sat out last season, also return.

Thomas expects several freshmen – he signed eight – to be contributors, including seven in-state runners. The group includes two from Blacksburg in Jennifer Fleming and Emily Beatty, but most of the group ran more of the middle distances (e.g. the 800 and 1,600) than the longer ones demanded by the sport of cross country. Thus, it may take some time for this group to be competitive in the ACC.

"I'm really going to miss the girls we just had," Thomas said. "They were a great group of people and performed so well for us at the end of their careers. But I'm excited with the freshmen. I think they have a good range of talent, from middle distance, 800 runners to potential 10K runners. We're starting to rebuild depth with this group."

Overall, Thomas – entering his 14th season as the head coach – likes the potential with both squads. Perhaps more importantly, he likes the direction of both programs going forward.

"I'm excited," he said. "My new assistant, Eric Johannigmeier, has done an outstanding job. He's really picked up the recruiting. It's the first time I've had a full-time assistant devoted to the distances, and we're seeing immediate payoff with recruiting. And the team's performances have been getting stronger and stronger each year."

Both squads open with the Hokie Invite on Sept. 4, followed by the VT Alumni Invite on Sept. 18. The ACC Championships will be held Oct. 30 in Tallahassee, Florida. 

After finishing second at the ACC Championships in 2013, Thomas Curtin is looking for gold this fall after taking a redshirt year last season.

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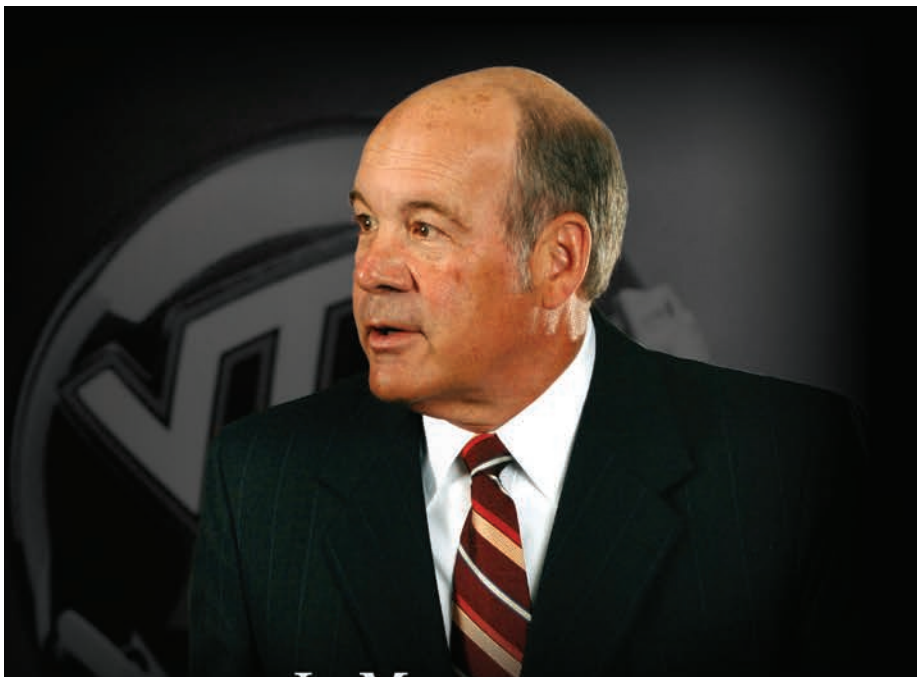
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IN MEMORIAM
JIM WEAVER
1945 - 2015

Jim Weaver, whose vision and leadership as the director of athletics lifted Virginia Tech from the Atlantic 10 to eventually the ACC, passed away in Blacksburg on July 2.

Weaver served as the director of athletics at Virginia Tech for more than 16 years from 1997-2013 before announcing in November of 2013 that he was retiring at the end of the calendar year because of health reasons.

Weaver's legacy will not be forgotten. Some of his accomplishments include the following:

- Guided the Hokies from the Atlantic 10 to the BIG EAST for all sports (except wrestling) and then to the ACC
- Committed more than \$200 million toward facilities during his tenure
- Spearheaded the building of the south end zone at Lane Stadium, the west side of Lane Stadium, the Hahn Hurst Basketball Practice Center, the football locker room, the baseball hitting facility, and he got the approval for the new indoor practice facility
- Hired outstanding coaches, such as Dave Cianelli, Ned Skinner, Kevin Dresser, Jim Thompson, Chugger Adair and others
- Led efforts to play Tennessee in the "Battle at Bristol" next year, a game that could break college football's all time attendance mark
- Added high-profile opponents to the Hokies' future football schedules, including games with Michigan, Penn State, Wisconsin and West Virginia
- Added women's golf as a varsity sport at Tech
- Fought for a larger staff in Virginia Tech's Student-Athlete Academic Support Services, which led to an impressive rise in graduation rates.
- Named AD of the Year by the National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics (NACDA) in May of 2014

Weaver left behind wife Traci, and four sons – Josh, Paul, Cole and Craig. Funeral services were held July 8 at Blacksburg United Methodist Church.

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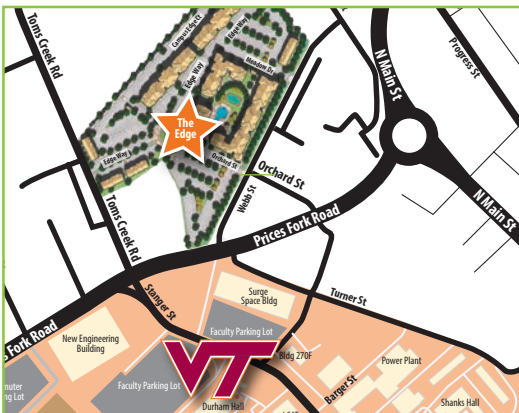
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